

The **Cenacle** *CENACLE*

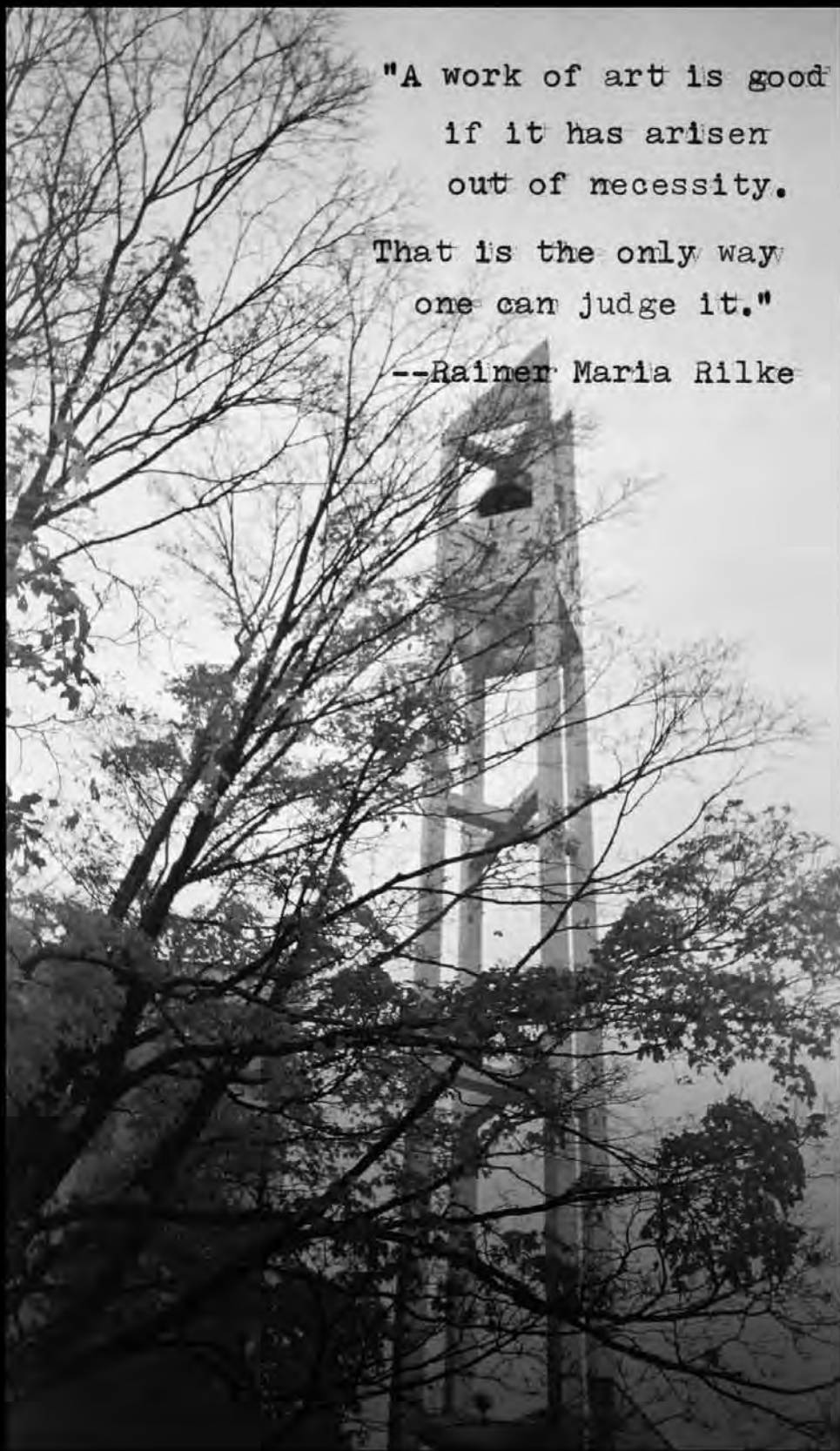


Number 76 * December 2010
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"A work of art is good
if it has arisen
out of necessity.

That is the only way
one can judge it."

--Rainer Maria Rilke



December 12, 2010
6:29 p.m.
Davis Square - Diesel Cafe
Somerville, MA

I've been considering lately the idea of expecting one person to come forward & change the world of men & women. A leader, a hero, a master. Not influence matters, shift things some, kick off deep rust, but change the world.

I don't think this hope is unique to this time, or any part of the world. And it's true that there are those that cause change, small & large. And the world does seem to change because of a given individual's decisions or actions.

What then? is... a helplessness persons feel among each other to breach the gap between one soul & another. Not by momentary flashes, but ongoing, a process assembled for understanding, perpetual empathy.

The tries are ambitious. The possibilities of LSD, of sex, of spirituality, among many others. The hope that the binding force needed will happen, finally, in 2012. Acid creaming. Communal living.

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Are these times more hopeless than others, or seeming so because they are occurring now? I tend to think the latter, having lived long enough to recall distinctly different years when equally many people felt a new age coming as did those who identified arriving apocalypse. One come to believe that humans have been struggling with the same matters of society, morality, mystery, & mortality for a long, long time, & coming up with too many imperfect answers. The last piece in the puzzle never fits, or is missing.

There simply is no agreement on how to live & why. On wherefrom or where to. Suspensions, theories, ideas elaborated as though discovered & confirmed fact — truth revealed.

How else to bring up children but to offer a set of valued ideas & approved behaviors? How else to regulate the distribution of land, of goods, of the ways by which societies will best perpetuate themselves? How else to transmit history & determine what

cultural artifacts ^{to} will be preserved to
communicate to the future the best of what
now was like?

Yes, indeed. But what I fall back upon,
badly, is something far more prosaic.
And I think it is more often true than
not. It is, in fact, transferable & trans-
latable to many times & places. Here's
an attempt to say...

I am sitting in a cafe, very crowded
but peaceable. I purchased a bottle of
spring water, that is, what its label
claims it to be. The table I sit at,
the chair I sit on, were made by
unknown hands where & when I
don't know. My clothes hold their stitches.
Nobody presses me to rob my wallet.
These facts, such as they are, are true
for everyone else sitting at the tables
near me.

These things, I believe, are important
because there is greater advantage
than disadvantage. Not always, but
often. The safety of those around me

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somewhat assures my own.

Needless suffering pains most people in most situations. Another's pleasure gives me or you some too more often than it doesn't. Collaboration feels at least as good as, & often better than, competition.

A body lies in crumpled agony in the street. Walk by, call the police, or hurry over to tend this person? If it can be said that most people in most instances would call the police or hurry over, then I believe there is genuine hope beyond the appearance of a savior or an omega point date.

Is it enough? I don't know. The world is full of suffering, & our damaged race is daily damaging further this only home. But I do believe this: that most of us would hurry over to that crumpled body to tend, to help, to comfort, is a powerful thing, a hint, a clue, that it's not just the man in the throne or at the pulpit who bear what is most needed. It's the strangers in this cafe, & you reading this page, & countless others. Really. At least maybe.

12-12-2018

The Cenacle

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2010

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Thanks to the members of the Jellicle Literary Guild for the great return to the East Coast in October . . . to President Obama for taking his blows in order to continue to defend the poor & jobless in the US . . . & to my blood-kin for another dear Thanksgiving gathering, first in awhile, hopefully annually again for years to come . . .



Tom Sheehan



Father

His face
is made of music,
notes of an order
I have yet to know.

The mystics
of his hands,
engraved with the timeless,
bear strange anointments.

The salt
of his touch, once known,
leaps up past
all of pain.

After God
and my father
there are no divinities.

Perhaps the Rain

In the barn
rain hangs on
like old statements.

Soft corners
keep themselves
wetter than rooting,

heave mushrooms
out of droppings swept
from stallions now but bone.

Spider webs,
taking up their dew,
walk on railroad silver,

aim for stars
locked at night
where roofed pine knots fall,

or the moon,
needing a drink,
drops its straws down.

It's wetter
likely underground,
but can't smell like this:

old blankets
out all night, dog's breath,
leather still breathing hidework

a mule threw
off his brewed chassis
barreling the field all day.

Lines My Father Left for Me

Crow a little bit when you're in good luck;
Own up, pay up, and shut up when you lose.

Fishing is the great solace in sports. It's for the mind,
not the hook. It's the time when you measure wins

and losses in the truest angle of all, a slant of unbearably
beautiful sunlight through morning's alder leaves, water's

whisper of confidence on rocks you think you can hear
later in the night, the pointed miracle of a trout beating

you at his game, letting you know the wins and losses
do come and do pass by, even standing still.

It's like the game of golf or the game of pool,
the green is highly coincident. And early in sports,

at the edge of my first failure, marked by the touch
of his hand on my shoulder: You come into this life

with two gifts, love and energy, and words and sports
are going to take both of them for all you've got.

I think his heart remembered a loss, his knees their pain.
When they took his leg off, the pain did not leave him.

Neither Yet This Morning Have I Seen You, Nor Now

Neither yet this morning have I seen you, nor now.

I'd swear it's a lost day, except a tulip tipped its cap
to the early sun, dew as fresh as the idea of you
caught up a lacquer on every green urging, at sea
a ship rose right out of Europe in the frontal tide;
and over the Mystic Bridge a pair of falcons, higher
than those iron fields, leapt atop a swelled thermal
the indescribable joys of dawn's parallax.

Mazed miracles of kelp, odd bottles fogged
with mysteries, banquet quantities of sea clams,
littered the beach after last night's storm.

If we argue, neither *this* nor *that*, neither *what*
nor *how*, will we have such residue, such
remnant, will love's debris be so graced?

Compensation

Coming home along the river,
clouds hallowing deep blue
pools for phantom trout,
I wait your presentation.

You walk beneath the ash tree,
trash bags bloom in your hands,
a light wind combs your hair
and selects outer strands

to be August's sole tinsel.
Soft stride presumes darkness
is still about reeds and rushes,
your hips float like two ships

on the bay at tide change.
Toil covets all your time,
thrusts you into worn denim,
shoes braced with solid heels,

demands quick deliverance
of a forgotten bride.
Thread me into your labors,
weave me onto the high day.

John Maciag

John Maciag was all bone
knees, elbows and jaw
hated his rifle
proficient at killing
wanted home so badly it burned his soul

We leaned up that mountain
near Yangu, frightened
War's hurricane tore our ranks
trees of us lifted by roots
I came running down three days later

Like cordwood the bodies were stacked
between two stakes
all Korean, but that jaw
of John Maciag I saw
a log of birch amongst the scrub

I stopped, the sergeant said move on
I said maybe never
I'm going to sit and think about John Maciag's
forever, whose fuel he is
what the flames of him will light
Perhaps he'll burn the glory
of God or man

Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor



Gluten-Free Guerrilla Cooking Book

[Novel-in-Progress]

Leaves

This fall is the first where the leaves have been aggressive. They threaten and bully, and images of Hitchcock's *The Birds* come to mind. The first was a large oak leaf on my windshield. The wipers cleared the other leaves; but this mottled yellow assailant dashed toward us and held on, blocking part of the view on the passenger side. It clung for blocks, knocking on the windshield as though trying to commandeer my car.

That was the first, but since then I have seen gangs of leaves, not floating through the air (as they do every fall in New England), but setting up a howl, gathering strength and flying AT things—at windows, people, dogs and cats, stairwells. Yesterday at work, during a meeting, the leaves swept violently at a bank of windows along the conference room, banging, challenging, demanding. What? Whatever leaves can demand or want. Their intentions have not been clear, just their intentness. They are not discarded; they are entities in themselves. They have risen. They are to be reckoned with; they will not be disregarded.

One clear message does abide: this leaf movement is a harbinger of things to come. Nature will not be overlooked this time. As gentle as it has become through global warming, it will now occasionally churn up a tsunami and overtake an island or two, or reinvent a shoreline. It is no respecter of persons, of place, of life. It is restless, mindlessly moving, yet with purpose.

* * *

House Plants

Everything in our house now is crazy-bright-feeling. Max has everything bending and twirling; plants are growing at odd angles and taking flight. There is a frighteningly gangly plant of unknown genus and species that keeps reaching for the ceiling, shooting out parasol leaf-clusters aiming upward. It started out three inches tall, and is now six feet tall in the corner of our living room, overwhelming the tiny Christmas-shop unfinished plant table it rests on. When it hits the ground, no longer fitting for a table, it will take over more and more, growing upward until it knocks a hole in the ceiling and plunges up through our bedroom, then through the loft and out to the sky.

A potted snap-dragon wings out at an angle never seen out-of-doors. The Jade is sprawling. D. H. Lawrence-style columbine seed-pods are rising erect from the once-placid purple coleus. Everything seems to be reaching.

And us? We are tentative as if we can't imagine how to wind and grow like these plants . . . and yet we are. It feels uneven, as though the ground might give out, and leave us floating.

* * *



Skies

The millennium shift has been eating away at me, transforming the earth underfoot. I have been dizzy, more and more, until I can rarely spend a whole day without swaying or falling, in a direction dictated by gravitational storm.

If there were any doubt, or need for external validation of these changes on the planet—which are so personally, kinesthetically real--the sky would clinch it. Since right before 2000 (1999, that is)—instead of one sky, there has been an eruption on a daily basis of *several* skies—not in sequence, but at once. In one single sky there will be cirrus clouds, stratus clouds *and* cumulus clouds. They will ride in layers, or cordon off different parts of the same sky, and ride toward each other. They will lie at different levels, and shift through each other like outstretched fingers, slowly or at a pace. One set will cast long shadows over the earth, while less presumptuous clouds will just puff along with grayish tinges.

One day last week, I witnessed several blimp-like clouds in the process of overtaking a broad sweep of winged, angel-clouds. The backdrop was a yellowish white in the southern, western and eastern quadrants, while the northern quadrant was breaking through with blue. A low, overbearing cloud nosed along from the South, looming close over office buildings, proclaiming itself, intruding. A giant, it presided over earth and sky with broad personality, nipping at smaller clouds, frightening sea gulls, shadowing the streets.

I drove away as its menace set upon the city. I wondered whether I would find the city the same the next day. Of course, the city is *never* the same twice; it's a moving, thrashing set of energies, hemmed by growing and crumbling structures. But I wondered whether it would be there in the same ways it had been, allowing the usual room for variation. And the city *was* still there the next day, perhaps just a bit more grey and churning.

And the overarching sky—completely untroubled by memory—produces the next set of multiple skies, complex, majestic, apocalyptic, without regard for what came before. The fundamentalists and the mystics talk about the last days coming; and I have to wonder, have we missed them? If I sway and fall to a wild and unfamiliar gravitational pull, if we admire double and triple, quadruple rainbows across a fractioned sky, are we in a time of something we don't know, can't fathom? We find our way haltingly, divorced from the earth and sky we knew before. Could it be so different? I look down at my feet and keep moving.

* * * * *



AbandonView

Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

*"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & hereon to appear under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

J. D. Salinger: In Memoriam

Biographical Notes

Born: Jerome David Salinger, January 1, 1919, New York City, New York, USA

Died: January 27, 2010, Cornish, New Hampshire, USA (Natural causes)

Family: Sol, father; Marie, mother; Doris, sister; Sylvia, wife (m. 1945, div. 1947), Claire, wife (m. 1955, div. 1967, one daughter, one son), Colleen (m. 1988); Matthew, son; Margaret, daughter

Schooling: Valley Forge Military Academy; Ursinus College; Columbia University

Other occupations: US Army Signal and Counter Intelligence Corps, World War II

Published Works:

- *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951, novel)
- *Nine Stories* (1953, short stories)
- *Franny and Zooey* (1961, short stories)
- *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters / Seymour: An Introduction* (1963, short stories)

* * * * *

Preliminary Notes

What it seems is happening is that JDS is moving deeper into a mystical view of the world, from story to story, and away from writing for the sake of fame and such. His characters, pilgrims, are both him and not him, they are his fictional partners in a quest for spiritual truth, and it seems like he eventually leaves the world of commercial publishing because it does not interest him anymore (he said as much in rare interviews). His stories remain interesting to the reader because his is polished, lucid prose, often funny. His ear for dialogue is diamond sharp, his eye for studying the right small detail, and just enough of them, is pretty much perfect. One

is exhausted by his works because when a story is over, if one has read attentively, something has happened. A prayer has been spoken, and completed. It was intense, it was funny, it was familiar, & yet odd. Now finished, one must go, leave the temple of words, and move along.

* * *

In a review of *Franny and Zooey*, John Updike, no less a brilliant writer, complains as follows: “Salinger loves the Glasses more than God loves them. He loves them too exclusively. Their invention has become a hermitage for him. He loves them to the detriment of artistic moderation.”¹ But the point is that Salinger is not interested in “artistic moderation.” Nothing in his stories reaches to achieve anything of the sort. His mission, loosely stated, is the try, again and again, for the blind exploding light epiphany. As Joyce did.

* * *

Salinger taught me that the singular matter of importance in writing is voice. Voice means many things: narrative, rhythm, music, character, flow, and so on. But voice sums them. Does the piece sounds like itself, like it gestated from its own purposes, or does it sound kinda like this one and sorta like that one? Voice is not unlike, or absolutely like, the idea of grace. One arrives to the state of grace not sure how it happened, unable to cough up a formula for others, or even for one’s future self should a sense of falling from it occur. Moreover, one knows it, when one is in one’s own voice. In recent years, I’ve come to believe that this idea of voice is not exclusively about Art, either. I’ve seen football players, statesmen, even persons in conversation, manifest as a kind of voice. It’s a complex idea, at least for me, to write of something so obvious yet be hesitant to feel confident that I’ve gotten it down clearly.

* * * * *



Epistolary Notes

*“An artist’s only concern is to shoot for some kind of perfection,
and on his own terms, not anyone else’s.”*

—“Zooney”

I spent years of my young manhood reading your four books & wondering what you were, how you did what you did on page, how I might too. I chased you as you chased your characters, came to reside among them, indifferent, at last to readers & to publishers & anyone else, frankly.

And I kept writing. Twas you & Rilke, a scant few others, Dickinson comes to mind, a shadow of Emerson, that nodded me along my way, not a path, quite, & still not. I kept an occasional eye on you, up there in Cornish, the famous, grumpy recluse whose sole novel was taught to millions of high school seniors year by year.

I’d been one, read *Catcher in the Rye* when I was 17 in 1981, nodded at its truth, not so much wondering at how you understood what it was like to be 17—horny & misunderstood, powerless, a cock, a heart, a lot of half-made questions, but wishing you’d say *what the fuck to do about it all*. At my worst now I’d say: write a famous novel, & live hidden off the royalty checks for decades.

But that gets at nothing. Less than nothing. You published three more books of fictions after *Catcher*. They showed maturation, they showed garrulous genius. They showed you increasingly didn’t give a fuck.

That was the lesson, if one at all, if one saw it & chose to grapple with it. *Don’t give a fuck*. Write your heart out, “with all your stars out,” aim at “perfection by your own terms.” Rilke had said as much before you, you echoed him, & were funny too.

So—to interrupt—you died nearly a year ago & it took till recently for me to confront this, your passing, you again, dead, & me not 17, & whatever any of this means.

I re-read *Catcher in the Rye* first, several weeks ago. Jobless, read it by mornings on my couch, in my quiet apartment, my wife gone to work with her smile & kiss. Read it morning by morning, seeing it for what it was, what it wasn’t. Seeing it later, no longer 17, no longer shocked by it. But back in those early 1950s, boy! Were they shocked! Even now, it still gets banned in places of terrified fanaticism. Holden Caulfield is a young, smart, horny boy who feels too much & sees no path for him to walk toward understanding. Feels things are wrong in the world. Too many “Fuck you” graffitos on too many walls. Too many scrawny underage prostitutes. Too many impoverished nuns & possibly gay schoolteachers. Too many people to love who do not love themselves. Too many slobs & phonies. Holden’s is the indiscriminating heart trying, unwilling, nearly unable, to learn discrimination. He suffers, misses everyone, even the lying bastards & crumb-bums.

Fine, I think now, cruelly, he needs to get laid. Or just blown. Or something. Would he just feel sorry for the girl’s serious look as she goes down on him, or her open-mouthed cry when she cums? Maybe, probably. I don’t know. Or will he get to college & work it out with books & professors & older women met at diners & Greenwich Village jazz clubs? I don’t know.

I turned to *Nine Stories*, & found that I still enjoyed it, but was less moved. In sum, you could not fully unload your metaphysical freight on such short trips. Your short masterpiece,

“For Esmé—With Love & Squalor” follows through on its possibilities, but the rest lose steam the moment you hit the epiphany. They fade. Climax, roll over, & go to sleep.

So I arrive to your final two books, each containing two novellas, *Franny and Zooey*, & *Raise High the Roofbeams, Carpenters / Seymour: An Introduction*. I re-read these four pieces last night & tonight swallowed myself whole in them, these half-century old works. You were alive through Obama’s election, well into his current term, yet these are the last published traces of you.

[Technically, your last published story was “Hapworth 16, 1924” but this epic mess of a story, which appeared in the June 19, 1965 issue of *The New Yorker*, never made it to book form. And it’s a poor story. I tried again to read it recently, faltered, fell asleep. Maybe I was just tired. Or feeling hurried to finish this piece. I prefer to think that this story is the sound of a door slamming on the reading audience. It *feels* like *goodbye*. Oddly, I came across a comment you made to the man, Roger Lathbury, who almost published this story in book form in 2000 or thereabouts. He said you called it a “a high point”² of your writing. Hm.]

The Glass Family. I wonder how many pages you wrote, unpublished, about them these past decades. Maybe it will sooner (or later) be known, the rumored manuscripts brought to life, given to the world.

Maybe. But I didn’t read these volumes for that reason. I read them to resurrect you in my mind, alive, living in New England also, yet a ghost, an artist who’d found his peace in ceasing to publish his works. Who’d believed, like Rilke, like Dickinson (for different reason perhaps), that not the audience but the act was paramount. How it feels to do, not how it feels to gain response.

So I read these books, closer upon each other, than ever I’d done back when. And I saw you disappearing into your work. You became a member of your own fictional family, not Jerome David Salinger, but Buddy Glass. Seems Buddy had written the works published under Salinger’s name. A sort of game, a sort of joke but, no, really not. Not at all. You’d lucked out writing a perennial bestseller; you were opting to get while the getting was still pretty good. Even back in the ’50s, the mass audience wanted sequels, not works increasingly difficult to read without complete surrender.

* * *

*“I say that the true artist-seer, the heavenly fool who can and does produce beauty,
is mainly dazzled to death by his own scruples,
the blinding shapes and colors of his own sacred human conscience.”*
—“Seymour: An Introduction”

Back in college, I wrote numerous papers on your stories. I worked them over, in truth, more for my own purposes than anything. The literature classes & their grades simply gave me good cover. I witnessed in my reading, time & again, & in these recent days as well, that you were taking an increasingly strange path in writing about the large Glass family—their roots in Vaudeville & radio & television, their obsession with Eastern thought, the nature of Art, & each other. The Glass family stories reflected your obsession with *them*. It was as though you’d finally gathered everything together, at least what mattered to you—a family of genius-artist-New Yorkers, whose lives were funny, tragic, odd, & even at moments humanly mundane.



But—and I keep running into this—writing about them seemed to clash with publishing these stories. Clash, & also was unnecessary. *Catcher* & the other books purchased you comfortable seclusion in Cornish, New Hampshire where the townspeople took to you as a friendly transplant who liked his privacy. Your books may not have interested many of them, but they all understood your wish for privacy.³

Thus, the mysteries remain. Where you took your fictional family, how life after publishing affected your Art. All I can do is say the following & marvel: from 1965 to 2010, nearly half a century, you wrote unknown numbers of pages. I tend to think at least hundreds, maybe thousands.

And my strange turn of mind wonders what your last work was like. When you were in your 80s, had seen the world change & change & change again.

* * *

"You can't ever find a place that's nice and peaceful, because there isn't any. You may think there is, but once you get there, when you're not looking, somebody will sneak up and write 'Fuck you' right under your nose. Try it sometime. I think, even, if I ever die, and they stick me in a cemetery, and I have a tombstone and all, it'll say 'Holden Caulfield' on it, and then what year I was born and what year I died, and then right under that it'll say 'Fuck you.' I'm positive, in fact."
—*The Catcher in the Rye*

It was some years ago, my friend M & I drove up to Cornish to look around. A pretty little New England town, on the Connecticut River, covered bridge to Windsor in Vermont (explained the PO Box that I'd read somewhere was yours being in Windsor not Cornish). A county fairgrounds, home to the annual Cornish Fair in August. I'm glad to have looked around that day, even if it really drew me little nearer to you.

In a way less famous & lucrative than you did, I've nonetheless walked a not dissimilar path to yours. I gave up publishing in others' periodicals after rejection letters many years ago. It seemed like too much work & too discouraging. There was no Internet back then to find encouragement; it was New York or nothing.

Eventually I took my youthful but abandoned notions of my own press, Scriptor Press, & made them real. I now publish & distribute how I wish. Underground. Not for profit. In a variety of mediums even.

My obsessions in Art have become my own after three decades of work. We share generally the twined themes of empathy & kindness, the struggle of one soul to breach the gap to touch another. But your return again & again to Eastern & Christian literature for a kind of intellectual grounding is not one I pursue. Similarly, I don't think your stories probably ever drenched in the kind of unitary psychedelic vision I work through over & over. Movies & TV shows & bunnies & beagles & forests & hotels do not affect your work with the sentient potency they do mine. But I wouldn't have got to where I am if I hadn't read your books to learn how you did it back then.

* * *

*“You take a really sleepy man, Esmé,
and he always stands a chance of again becoming a man with all his fac—
with all his f-a-c-u-l-t-i-e-s intact.”*
—“For Esmé—With Love and Squalor”

I'd like to think that, whatever else you were in life, the part of you that made it to the page, & was published in books, was some of your best. For it is on the written page that I know you best—not in photos, or anecdotal accounts of your friends or family, or even in biographies. I'd like to think that the marble & mud of your life is distilled to the four books you published. That in their pages you asked your best questions, offered up your best answers, your hopes, your fears, & so on.

I think this because it seems to be reasonably true & because I do the same thing. Much of my best arrives on the page (& some of my worst, & a lot else too). And if there were no more stories to come from you, post-mortem, if you simply never wrote any, or burned them all at some point, I'd like to think that this is OK. I don't know this for sure but it's a hope. I admit a greater hope is a big cache of stories due in book form on a near timeline.

But whatever else I do or don't know, or don't know how to know for sure, this: you were a brilliant writer, affected & still affect my life—&, like long-dead Seymour's effect on his fictional family, of which you took your own part, you yourself live ever on profoundly large, continually forming & reforming, in my heart & head. You have my deepest gratitude & affection. Rest in peace, brother.



Endnotes

¹ “Anxious Days for the Glass Family,” *New York Times*, September 17, 1961.

² “Betraying Salinger,” *New York Magazine*, April 4, 2010.

³ For a different perspective, see “J. D. Salinger a Recluse? Well, Not to His Neighbors,” *New York Times*, January 31, 2010.

* * * * *



AbandonView

J. D. Salinger

For Esmé—With Love and Squalor

[Classic Fiction]

Just recently, by air mail, I received an invitation to a wedding that will take place in England on April 18th. It happens to be a wedding I'd give a lot to be able to get to, and when the invitation first arrived, I thought it might just be possible for me to make the trip abroad, by plane, expenses be hanged. However, I've since discussed the matter rather extensively with my wife, a breathtakingly levelheaded girl, and we've decided against it—for one thing, I'd completely forgotten that my mother-in-law is looking forward to spending the last two weeks in April with us. I really don't get to see Mother Grencher terribly often, and she's not getting any younger. She's fifty-eight. (As she'd be the first to admit.)

All the same, though, *wherever* I happen to be I don't think I'm the type that doesn't even lift a finger to prevent a wedding from flattening. Accordingly, I've gone ahead and jotted down a few revealing notes on the bride as I knew her almost six years ago. If my notes should cause the groom, whom I haven't met, an uneasy moment or two, so much the better. Nobody's aiming to please, here. More, really, to edify, to instruct.

In April of 1944, I was among some sixty American enlisted men who took a rather specialized pre-Invasion training course, directed by British Intelligence, in Devon, England. And as I look back, it seems to me that we were fairly unique, the sixty of us, in that there wasn't one good mixer in the bunch. We were all essentially letter-writing types, and when we spoke to each other out of the line of duty, it was usually to ask somebody if he had any ink he wasn't using. When we weren't writing letters or attending classes, each of us went pretty much his own way. Mine usually led me, on clear days, in scenic circles around the countryside. Rainy days, I generally sat in a dry place and read a book, often just an axe length away from a ping-pong table.

The training course lasted three weeks, ending on a Saturday, a very rainy one. At seven that last night, our whole group was scheduled to entrain for London, where, as rumor had it, we were to be assigned to infantry and airborne divisions mustered for the D Day landings. By three in the afternoon, I'd packed all my belongings into my barrack bag, including a canvas gas-mask container full of books I'd brought over from the Other Side. (The gas mask itself I'd slipped through a porthole of the *Mauretania* some weeks earlier, fully aware that if the enemy ever *did* use gas I'd never get the damn thing on in time.) I remember standing at an end window of our Quonset hut for a very long time, looking out at the slanting, dreary rain, my trigger finger itching imperceptibly, if at all. I could hear behind my back the uncomradely scratching of many fountain pens on many sheets of V-mail paper. Abruptly, with nothing special in mind, I came away from the window and put on my raincoat, cashmere muffler, galoshes, woolen gloves, and overseas cap (the last of which, I'm still told, I wore at an angle all my own—slightly down over both ears). Then, after synchronizing my wristwatch with the clock in the latrine, I walked down the long, wet cobblestone hill into town. I ignored the

flashes of lightning all around me. They either had your number on them or they didn't.

In the center of town, which was probably the wettest part of town, I stopped in front of a church to read the bulletin board, mostly because the featured numerals, white on black, had caught my attention but partly because, after three years in the Army, I'd become addicted to reading bulletin boards. At three-fifteen, the board stated, there would be children's-choir practice. I looked at my wristwatch, then back at the board. A sheet of paper was tacked up, listing the names of the children expected to attend practice. I stood in the rain and read all the names, then entered the church.

A dozen or so adults were among the pews, several of them bearing pairs of small-size rubbers, soles up, in their laps. I passed along and sat down in the front row. On the rostrum, seated in three compact rows of auditorium chairs, were about twenty children, mostly girls, ranging in age from about seven to thirteen. At the moment, their choir coach, an enormous woman in tweeds, was advising them to open their mouths wider when they sang. Had anyone, she asked, ever heard of a little dickybird that *dared* to sing his charming song without first opening his little beak wide, wide, wide? Apparently nobody ever had. She was given a steady, opaque look. She went on to say that she wanted *all* her children to absorb the *meaning* of the words she sang, not just *mouth* them, like silly-billy parrots. She then blew a note on her pitch pipe, and the children, like so many underage weight-lifters, raised their hymnbooks.

They sang without instrumental accompaniment—or, more accurately in their case, without any interference. Their voices were melodious and unsentimental, almost to the point where a somewhat more denominational man than myself might, without straining, have experienced levitation. A couple of the very youngest children dragged the tempo a trifle, but in a way that only the composer's mother could have found fault with. I had never heard the hymn, but I kept hoping it was one with a dozen or more verses. Listening, I scanned all the children's faces but watched one in particular, that of the child nearest me, on the end seat in the front row. She was about thirteen, with straight ash-blond hair of ear-lobe length, an exquisite forehead, and blasé eyes that, I thought, might very possibly have counted the house. Her voice was distinctly separate from the other children's voices, and not just because she was seated near me. It had the best upper register, the sweetest-sounding, the surest, and it automatically led the way. The young lady, however, seemed slightly bored with her own singing ability, or perhaps just with the time and place; twice, between verses, I saw her yawn. It was a ladylike yawn, a close-mouthed yawn, but you couldn't miss it; her nostril wings gave her away.

The instant the hymn ended, the choir coach began to give her lengthy opinion of people who can't keep their feet still and their lips sealed tight during the minister's sermon. I gathered that the singing part of the rehearsal was over, and before the coach's dissonant speaking voice could entirely break the spell the children's singing had cast, I got up and left the church.

It was raining even harder. I walked down the street and looked through the window of the Red Cross recreation room, but soldiers were standing two and three deep at the coffee counter, and, even through the glass, I could hear ping-pong balls bouncing in another room. I crossed the street and entered a civilian tearoom, which was empty except for a middle-aged waitress, who looked as if she would have preferred a customer with a dry raincoat. I used a coat tree as delicately as possible, and then sat down at a table and ordered tea and cinnamon toast. It was the first time all day I'd spoken to anyone. I then looked through all my pockets,

including my raincoat, and finally found a couple of stale letters to reread, one from my wife, telling me how the service at Schrafft's Eighty-eighth Street had fallen off, and one from my mother-in-law, asking me to please send her some cashmere yarn first chance I got away from "camp."

While I was still on my first cup of tea, the young lady I had been watching and listening to in the choir came into the tearoom. Her hair was soaking wet, and the rims of both ears were showing. She was with a very small boy, unmistakably her brother, whose cap she removed by lifting it off his head with two fingers, as if it were a laboratory specimen. Bringing up the rear was an efficient-looking woman in a limp felt hat—presumably their governess. The choir member, taking off her coat as she walked across the floor, made the table selection—a good one, from my point of view, as it was just eight or ten feet directly in front of me. She and the governess sat down. The small boy, who was about five, wasn't ready to sit down yet. He slid out of and discarded his reefer; then, with the deadpan expression of a born heller, he methodically went about annoying his governess by pushing in and pulling out his chair several times, watching her face. The governess, keeping her voice down, gave him two or three orders to sit down and, in effect, stop the monkey business, but it was only when his sister spoke to him that he came around and applied the small of his back to his chair seat. He immediately picked up his napkin and put it on his head. His sister removed it, opened it, and spread it out on his lap.

About the time their tea was brought, the choir member caught me staring over at her party. She stared back at me, with those house-counting eyes of hers, then, abruptly, gave me a small, qualified smile. It was oddly radiant, as certain small, qualified smiles sometimes are. I smiled back, much less radiantly, keeping my upper lip down over a coal-black G.I. temporary filling showing between two of my front teeth. The next thing I knew, the young lady was standing, with enviable poise, beside my table. She was wearing a tartan dress—a Campbell tartan, I believe. It seemed to me to be a wonderful dress for a very young girl to be wearing on a rainy, rainy day. "I thought Americans despised tea," she said.

It wasn't the observation of a smart aleck but that of a truth-lover or a statistics-lover. I replied that some of us never drank anything *but* tea. I asked her if she'd care to join me.

"Thank you," she said. "Perhaps for just a fraction of a moment."

I got up and drew a chair for her, the one opposite me, and she sat down on the forward quarter of it, keeping her spine easily and beautifully straight. I went back—almost hurried back—to my own chair, more than willing to hold up my end of a conversation. When I was seated, I couldn't think of anything to say, though. I smiled again, still keeping my coal-black filling under concealment. I remarked that it was certainly a terrible day out.

"Yes; quite," said my guest, in the clear, unmistakable voice of a small-talk detester. She placed her fingers flat on the table edge, like someone at a séance, then, almost instantly, closed her hands—her nails were bitten down to the quick. She was wearing a wristwatch, a military-looking one that looked rather like a navigator's chronograph. Its face was much too large for her slender wrist. "You were at choir practice," she said matter-of-factly. "I saw you."

I said I certainly had been, and that I had heard her singing separately from the others. I said I thought she had a very fine voice.

She nodded. "I know. I'm going to be a professional singer."

"Really? Opera?"

"Heavens, no. I'm going to sing jazz on the radio and make heaps of money. Then,

when I'm thirty, I shall retire and live on a ranch in Ohio." She touched the top of her soaking-wet head with the flat of her hand. "Do you know Ohio?" she asked.

I said I'd been through it on the train a few times but that I didn't really know it. I offered her a piece of cinnamon toast.

"No, thank you," she said. "I eat like a bird, actually."

I bit into a piece of toast myself, and commented that there's some mighty rough country around Ohio.

"I know. An American I met told me. You're the eleventh American I've met."

Her governess was now urgently signaling her to return to her own table—in effect, to stop bothering the man. My guest, however, calmly moved her chair an inch or two so that her back broke all possible further communication with the home table. "You go to that secret Intelligence school on the hill, don't you?" she inquired coolly.

As security-minded as the next one, I replied that I was visiting Devonshire for my health.

"*Really*," she said. "I wasn't quite born yesterday, you know."

I said I'd bet she hadn't been, at that. I drank my tea for a moment. I was getting a trifle posture-conscious and I sat up somewhat straighter in my seat.

"You seem quite intelligent for an American," my guest mused.

I told her that was a pretty snobbish thing to say, if you thought about it at all, and that I hoped it was unworthy of her.

She blushed—automatically conferring on me the social poise I'd been missing. "Well. Most of the Americans *I've* seen act like animals. They're forever punching one another about, and insulting everyone, and—You know what one of them did?"

I shook my head.

"One of them threw an empty whiskey bottle through my aunt's window. *Fortunately*, the window was open. But does that sound very intelligent to you?"

It didn't especially, but I didn't say so. I said that many soldiers, all over the world, were a long way from home, and that few of them had had many real advantages in life. I said I'd thought that most people could figure that out for themselves.

"Possibly," said my guest, without conviction. She raised her hand to her wet head again, picked at a few limp filaments of blond hair, trying to cover her exposed ear rims. "My hair is soaking wet," she said. "I look a fright." She looked over at me. "I have quite wavy hair when it's dry."

"I can see that, I can see you have."

"Not actually curly, but quite wavy," she said. "Are you married?"

I said I was.

She nodded. "Are you very deeply in love with your wife? Or am I being too personal?"

I said that when she was, I'd speak up.

She put her hands and wrists farther forward on the table, and I remember wanting to do something about that enormous-faced wristwatch she was wearing—perhaps suggest that she try wearing it around her waist.

"Usually, I'm not terribly gregarious," she said, and looked over at me to see if I knew the meaning of the word. I didn't give her a sign, though, one way or the other. "I purely came over because I thought you looked extremely lonely. You have an extremely sensitive face."

I said she was right, that I *had* been feeling lonely, and that I was very glad she'd come

over.

"I'm training myself to be more compassionate. My aunt says I'm a terribly cold person," she said and felt the top of her head again. "I live with my aunt. She's an extremely kind person. Since the death of my mother, she's done everything within her power to make Charles and me feel adjusted."

"I'm glad."

"Mother was an extremely intelligent person. Quite sensuous, in many ways." She looked at me with a kind of fresh acuteness. "Do you find me terribly cold?"

I told her absolutely not—very much to the contrary, in fact. I told her my name and asked for hers.

She hesitated. "My first name is Esmé. I don't think I shall tell my full name, for the moment. I have a title and you may just be impressed by titles. Americans are, you know."

I said I didn't think I would be, but that it might be a good idea, at that, to hold on to the title for awhile.

Just then, I felt someone's warm breath on the back of my neck. I turned around and just missed brushing noses with Esmé's small brother. Ignoring me, he addressed his sister in a piercing treble: "Miss Megley said you must come and finish you tea!" His message delivered, he retired to the chair between his sister and me, on my right. I regarded him with high interest. He was looking very splendid in brown Shetland shorts, a navy-blue jersey, white shirt, and striped necktie. He gazed back at me with immense green eyes. "Who do people in films kiss sideways?" he demanded.

"Sideways?" I said. It was a problem that had baffled me in my childhood. I said I guessed it was because actors' noses are too big for kissing anyone head on.

"His name is Charles," Esmé said. "He's extremely brilliant for his age."

"He certainly has green eyes. Haven't you, Charles?"

Charles gave me the fishy look my question deserved, then wriggled downward and forward in his chair till all of his body was under the table except his head, which he left, wrestler's-bridge style, on the chair seat. "They're orange," he said in a strained voice, addressing the ceiling. He picked up a corner of the tablecloth and put it over his handsome, deadpan little face.

"Sometimes he's brilliant and sometimes he's not," Esmé said. "Charles, do sit up!"

Charles stayed right where he was. He seemed to be holding his breath.

"He misses our father very much. He was s-l-a-i-n in North Africa."

I expressed regret to hear it.

Esmé nodded. "Father adored him." She bit reflectively at the cuticle of her thumb. "He looks very much like my mother—Charles, I mean. I look exactly like my father." She went on biting at her cuticle. "My mother was quite a passionate woman. She was an extrovert. Father was an introvert. They were quite well mated, though, in a superficial way. To be quite candid, Father really needed more an intellectual companion than Mother was. He was an extremely gifted genius."

I waited, receptively, for further information, but none came. I looked down at Charles, who was now resting the side of his face on his chair seat. When he saw that I was looking at him, he closed his eyes, sleepily, angelically, then stuck out his tongue—an appendage of startling length—and gave what in *my* county would have been a glorious tribute to a myopic baseball umpire. It fairly shook the tearoom.

“Stop that,” Esmé said, clearly unshaken. “He saw an American do it in a fish-and-chips queue, and now he does it whenever he’s bored. Just stop it, now, or I shall send you directly to Miss Megley.”

Charles opened his enormous eyes, as sign that he’d heard his sister’s threat, but otherwise didn’t look especially alerted. He closed his eyes again, and continued to rest the side of his face on the chair seat.

I mentioned that maybe he ought to save it—meaning the Bronx cheer—till he started using he title regularly. That is, if he had a title, too.

Esmé gave me a long, faintly clinical look. “You have a dry sense of humor, haven’t you?” she said—wistfully. “Father said I have no sense of humor at all. He said I was unequipped to meet life because I have no sense of humor.”

Watching her, I lit a cigarette and said I didn’t think a sense of humor was of any use in a real pinch.

“Father said it was.”

This was a statement of faith, not a contradiction, and I quickly switched horses. I nodded and said her father had probably taken the long view, while I was taking the short (whatever *that* meant).

“Charles misses him exceedingly,” Esmé said, after a moment. “He was an exceedingly lovable man. He was extremely handsome, too. Not that one’s appearance matters greatly, but he was. He had terribly penetrating eyes, for a man who was intrinsically kind.”

I nodded. I said I imagined her father had had an extraordinary vocabulary.

“Oh, yes; quite,” said Esmé. “He was an archivist—amateur, of course.”

At that point, I felt an importunate tap, almost a punch, on my upper arm, from Charles’ direction. I turned to him. He was sitting in a fairly normal position in his chair now, except that he had one knee tucked under him. “What did one wall say to the other wall?” he asked shrilly. “It’s a riddle!”

I rolled my eyes reflectively ceilingward and repeated the question aloud. Then I looked at Charles with a stumped expression and said I gave up.

“Meet you at the corner!” came the punch line, at top volume.

It went over biggest with Charles himself. It struck him as unbearably funny. In fact, Esmé had to come around and pound him on the back, as if treating him for a coughing spell. “Now stop that,” she said. She went back to her own seat. “He tells that same riddle to everyone he meets and has a fit every single time. Usually he drools when he laughs. Now, just stop, please.”

“It’s one of the best riddles I’ve heard, though,” I said, watching Charles, who was very gradually coming out of it. In response to this compliment, he sank considerably lower in his chair and again masked his face up to the eyes with a corner of the tablecloth. He then looked at me with his exposed eyes, which were full of slowly subsiding mirth and the pride of someone who knows a really good riddle or two.

“May I inquire how you were employed before entering the Army?” Esmé asked me.

I said that I hadn’t been employed at all, that I’d only been out of college a year but that I like to think of myself as a professional short-story writer.

She nodded politely. “Published?” she asked.

It was a familiar but always touchy question, and one that I didn’t answer just one, two, three. I started to explain how most editors in America were a bunch—



"My father wrote beautifully," Esmé interrupted. "I'm saving a number of his letters for posterity."

I said that sounded like a very good idea. I happened to be looking at her enormous-faced, chronographic wristwatch again. I asked if it had belonged to her father.

She looked down at her wrist solemnly. "Yes, it did," she said. "He gave it to me just before Charles and I were evacuated." Self-consciously, she took her hands off the table, saying, "Purely as a memento, of course." She guided the conversation in a different direction. "I'd be extremely flattered if you'd write a story exclusively for me sometime. I'm an avid reader."

I told her I certainly would, if I could. I said that I wasn't terribly prolific.

"It doesn't have to be terribly prolific! Just so that it isn't childish and silly." She reflected. "I prefer stories about squalor."

"About what?" I said, leaning forward.

"Squalor. I'm extremely interested in squalor."

I was about to press her for more details, but I felt Charles pinching me, hard, on my arm. I turned to him, wincing slightly. He was standing right next to me. "What did one wall say to the other wall?" he asked, not unfamiliarly.

"You asked him that," Esmé said. "Now, stop it."

Ignoring his sister, and stepping up on one of my feet, Charles repeated the key question. I noticed that his necktie knot wasn't adjusted properly. I slid it up into place, then, looking him straight in the eye, suggested, "Meetcha at the corner?"

The instant I'd said it, I wished I hadn't. Charles' mouth fell open. I felt as if I'd struck it open. He stepped down off my foot and, with white-hot dignity, walked over to his own table, without looking back.

"He's furious," Esmé said. "He has a violent temper. My mother had a propensity to spoil him. My father was the only one who didn't spoil him."

I kept looking over at Charles, who had sat down and started to drink his tea, using both hands on the cup. I hoped he'd turn around, but he didn't.

Esmé stood up. "*Il faut que je parte aussi.*" she said, with a sigh. "Do you know French?"

I got up from my own chair, with mixed feelings of regret and confusion. Esmé and I shook hands; her hand, as I'd suspected, was a nervous hand, damp at the palm. I told her, in English, how very much I'd enjoyed her company.

She nodded. "I thought you might," she said. "I'm quite communicative for my age." She gave her hair another experimental touch. "I'm dreadfully sorry about my hair," she said. "I've probably been hideous to look at."

"Not at all! As a matter of fact, I think a lot of the wave is coming back already."

She quickly touched her hair again. "Do you think you'll be coming here again in the immediate future?" she asked. "We come here every Saturday, after choir practice."

I answered that I'd like nothing better but that, unfortunately, I was pretty sure I wouldn't be able to make it again.

"In other words, you can't discuss troop movements," said Esmé. She made no move to leave the vicinity of the table. In fact, she crossed one foot over the other and, looking down, aligned the toes of her shoes. It was a pretty little execution, for she was wearing white socks and her ankles and feet were lovely. She looked up at me abruptly. "Would you like me to write to you?" she asked, with a certain amount of color in her face. "I write extremely articulate letters for a person my—"

"I'd love it." I took out pencil and paper and wrote down my name, rank, serial number, and A.P.O. number.

"I shall write to you first," she said, accepting it, "so that you don't feel *compromised* in any way." She put the address into a pocket of her dress. "Goodbye," she said, and walked back to her table.

I ordered another pot of tea and sat watching the two of them till they, and the harassed Miss Megley, got up to leave. Charles led the way out, limping tragically, like a man with one leg several inches shorter than the other. He didn't look over at me. Miss Megley went next, then Esmé, who waved at me. I waved back, half getting up from my chair. It was a strangely emotional moment for me.

Less than a minute later, Esmé came back into the tearoom, dragging Charles behind her by the sleeve of his reefer. "Charles would like to kiss you goodbye," she said.

I immediately put down my cup, and said that was very nice, but was she *sure*?

"Yes," she said, a trifle grimly. She let go Charles' sleeve and gave him a rather vigorous push in my direction. He came forward, his face livid, and gave me a loud, wet smacker just below the right ear. Following this ordeal, he started to make a beeline for the door and a less sentimental way of life, but I caught the half belt at the back of his reefer, held on to it, and asked him, "What did one wall say to the other wall?"

His face lit up. "Meet you at the corner!" he shrieked, and raced out of the room, possibly in hysterics.

Esmé was standing with crossed ankles again. "You're quite sure you won't forget to write that story for me?" she said. "It doesn't have to be *exclusively* for me. It can—"

I said there was absolutely no chance that I'd forget. I told her that I'd never written a story *for* anybody, but that it seemed like exactly the right time to get down to it.

She nodded. "Make it extremely squalid and moving," she suggested. "Are you at all acquainted with squalor?"

I said not exactly but that I was getting better acquainted with it, in one form or another, all the time, and that I'd do my best to come up to her specifications. We shook hands.

"Isn't it a pity that we didn't meet under less extenuating circumstances?"

I said it was, I said it certainly was.

"Goodbye," Esmé said. "I hope you return from the war with all your faculties intact."

I thanked her, and said a few other words, and then watched her leave the tearoom. She left it slowly, reflectively, testing the ends of her hair for dryness.

This is the squalid, or moving, part of the story, and the scene changes. The people change, too. I'm still around, but from here on in, for reasons I'm not at liberty to disclose, I've disguised myself so cunningly that even the cleverest reader will fail to recognize me.

It was about ten-thirty at night in Gaufurt, Bavaria, several weeks after V-E Day. Staff Sergeant X was in his room on the second floor of the civilian home in which he and nine other American soldiers had been quartered, even before the armistice. He was seated on a folding wooden chair at a small, messy-looking writing table, with a paperback overseas novel before him, which he was having great trouble reading. The trouble lay with him, not the novel. Although the men who lived on the first floor usually had first grab at the books sent each month by Special Services, X usually seemed to be left with the book he might have selected

himself. But he was a young man who had not come through the war with all his faculties intact, and for more than an hour he had been triple-reading paragraphs, and now he was doing it to sentences. He suddenly closed the book, without marking his place. With his hand, he shielded his eyes for a moment against the harsh, watty glare from the naked bulb over the table.

He took a cigarette from a pack on the table and lit it with fingers that bumped gently and incessantly against one another. He sat back a trifle in his chair and smoked without any sense of taste. His gums bled at the slightest pressure of the top of his tongue, and he seldom stopped experimenting; it was a little game he played, sometimes by the hour. He sat for a moment smoking and experimenting. Then, abruptly, familiarly, and, as usual, with no warning, he thought he felt his mind dislodge itself and teeter, like insecure luggage on an overhead rack. He quickly did what he had been doing for weeks to set things right: he pressed his hands hard against his temples. He held on tight for a moment. His hair needed cutting, and it was dirty. He had washed it three or four times during his two weeks' stay at the hospital in Frankfurt on the Main, but it had got dirty again on the long, dusty jeep ride back to Gaufurt. Corporal Z, who had called for him at the hospital, still drove a jeep combat-style, with the windshield down on the hood, armistice or no armistice. There were thousands of new troops in Germany. By driving with his windshield down, combat-style, Corporal Z hoped to show that he was not one of them, that not by a long shot was he some new son of a bitch in the E.T.O.

When he let go of his head, X began to stare at the surface of the writing table, which was a catchall for at least two dozen unopened letters and at least five or six unopened packages, all addressed to him. He reached behind the debris and picked out a book that stood against the wall. It was a book by Goebbels, entitled "Die Zeit Ohne Beispiel." It belonged to the thirty-eight-year-old, unmarried daughter of the family that, up to a few weeks earlier, had been living in the house. She had been a low official in the Nazi Party, but high enough, by Army Regulations standards, to fall into an automatic-arrest category. X himself had arrested her. Now, for the third time since he had returned from the hospital that day, he opened the woman's book and read the brief inscription on the flyleaf. Written in ink, in German, in a small, hopelessly sincere handwriting, were the words "Dear God, life is hell." Nothing led up to or away from it. Alone on the page, and in the sickly stillness of the room, the words appeared to have the stature of an uncontested, even classic indictment. X stared at the page for several minutes, trying, against heavy odds, not to be taken in. Then, with far more zeal than he had done anything in weeks, he picked up a pencil stub and wrote down under the inscription, in English, "Fathers and teachers, I ponder 'What is hell?' I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love." He started to write Dostoevski's name under the inscription, but saw—with fright that ran through his whole body—that what he had written was almost entirely illegible. He shut the book.

He quickly picked up something else from the table, a letter from his older brother in Albany. It had been on his table even before he had checked into the hospital. He opened the envelope, loosely resolved to read the letter straight through, but read only the top half of the first page. He stopped after the words "Now that the g.d. war is over and you probably have a lot of time over there, how about sending the kids a couple of bayonets or swastikas . . ." After he'd torn it up, he looked down at the pieces as they lay in the wastebasket. He saw that he had overlooked an enclosed snapshot. He could make out somebody's feet standing on a lawn

somewhere.

He put his arms on the table and rested his head on them. He ached from head to foot, all zones of pain seemingly interdependent. He was rather like a Christmas tree whose lights, wired in series, must all go out if even one bulb is defective.

The door banged open, without having been rapped on. X raised his head, turned it, and saw Corporal Z standing in the door. Corporal Z had been X's jeep partner and constant companion from D Day straight through five campaigns of the war. He lived on the first floor and he usually came up to see X when he had a few rumors or gripes to unload. He was a huge, photogenic young man of twenty-four. During the war, a national magazine had photographed him in Hürtgen Forest; he had posed, more than just obligingly, with a Thanksgiving turkey in each hand. "Ya writin' letters?" he asked X. "It's spooky in here, for Chrissake." He preferred always to enter a room that had the overhead light turned on.

X turned around in his chair and asked him to come in, and to be careful not to step on the dog.

"Alvin. He's right under your feet, Clay. How 'bout turning on the goddamn light?"

Clay found the overhead-light switch, flicked it on, then stepped across the puny, servant's-size room and sat down on the edge of the bed, facing his host. His brick-red hair, just combed, was dripping with the amount of water he required for satisfactory grooming. A comb with a fountain-pen clip protruded, familiarly, from the right-hand pocket of his olive-drab shirt. Over the left-hand pocket he was wearing the Combat Infantrymen's Badge (which, technically, he wasn't authorized to wear), the European Theatre ribbon, with five bronze battle stars in it (instead of a lone silver one, which was the equivalent of five bronze ones), and the pre-Pearl Harbor service ribbon. He sighed heavily and said, "Christ almighty." It meant nothing; it was Army. He took a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket, tapped one out, then put away the pack and rebuttoned the pocket flap. Smoking, he looked vacuously around the room. His look finally settled on the radio. "Hey," he said. "They got this terrific show comin' on the radio in a coupla minutes. Bob Hope, and everybody."

X, opening a fresh pack of cigarettes, said he had just turned the radio off.

Undarkened, Clay watched X trying to get a cigarette lit. "Jesus," he said, with spectator's enthusiasm, "you oughta see your goddam hands. Boy, have you got the shakes. Ya know that?"

X got his cigarette lit, nodded, and said Clay had a real eye for detail.

"No kidding, hey. I goddam near fainted when I saw you at the hospital. You looked like a goddam *corpse*. How much weight ya lose? How many pounds? Ya know?"

"I don't know. How was your mail when I was gone? You heard from Loretta?"

Loretta was Clay's girl. They intended to get married at their earliest convenience. She wrote to him fairly regularly, from a paradise of triple exclamation points and inaccurate observations. All through the war, Clay had read all Loretta's letters aloud to X, however intimate they were—in fact, the more intimate, the better. It was his custom, after each reading, to ask X to plot out or pad out the letter of reply, or to insert a few impressive words in French or German.

"Yeah, I had a letter from her yesterday. Down in my room. Show it to ya later," Clay said, listlessly. He sat up straight on the edge of the bed, held his breath, and issued a long, resonant belch. Looking just semi-pleased with his achievement, he relaxed again. "Her goddam brother's gettin' outa the Navy on account of his hip," he said. "He's got this hip,

the bastard.” He sat up again and tried for another belch, but with below-par results. A jot of alertness came into his face. “Hey. Before I forget. We gotta get up at five tomorrow and drive to Hamburg or someplace. Pick up Eisenhower jackets for the whole detachment.”

X, regarding him hostilely, stated that he didn’t want an Eisenhower jacket.

Clay looked surprised, almost a trifle hurt. “Oh, they’re good! They look good. How come?”

“No reason. Why do we have to get up at five? The war’s over, for God’s sake,”

“I don’t know—we gotta get back before lunch. They got some new forms in we gotta fill out before lunch. . . . I asked Bulling how come we couldn’t fill ’em out tonight—he’s *got* the goddam forms right on his desk. He don’t want to open the envelopes yet, the son of a bitch.”

The two sat quiet for a moment, hating Bulling.

Clay suddenly looked at X with new—higher—interest than before. “Hey,” he said. “Did you know the goddam side of your face is jumping all over the place?”

X said he knew all about it, and covered his tic with his hand.

Clay stared at him for a moment, then said, rather vividly, as if he were the bearer of exceptionally good news, “I wrote Loretta you had a nervous breakdown.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. She’s interested as hell in all that stuff. She’s majoring in psychology.” Clay stretched himself out on the bed, shoes included. “You know what she said? She says nobody gets a nervous breakdown just from the war and all. She says you probably were unstable like, your whole goddam life.”

X bridged his hands over his eyes—the light over the bed seemed to be blinding him—and said that Loretta’s insight into things was always a joy.

Clay glanced over at him. “Listen, ya bastard,” he said. “She knows a goddam sight more psychology than *you* do.”

“Do you think you can bring yourself to take your stinking feet off my bed?” X asked.

Clay left his feet where they were for a few don’t-tell-me-where-to-put-my-feet seconds, then swung them around to the floor and sat up. “I’m goin’ downstairs anyway. They got the radio on in Walker’s room.” He didn’t get up from the bed, though. “Hey. I was just tellin’ that new son of a bitch, Bernstein, downstairs. Remember that time I and you drove into Valognes, and we got shelled for two goddam hours, and that goddam cat I shot that jumped up on the hood of the jeep when we were layin’ in that hole? Remember?”

“Yes—don’t start that business with that cat again, Clay, God damn it. I don’t want to hear about it.”

“No, all I mean is I wrote Loretta about it. She and the whole psychology class discussed it. In class and all. The goddam professor and everybody.”

“That’s fine. I don’t want to hear about it, Clay.”

“No, you know the reason I took a pot shot at it, Loretta says? She says I was temporarily insane. No kidding. From the shelling and all.”

X threaded his fingers, once, through his dirty hair, then shielded his eyes against the light again. “You weren’t insane. You were simply doing your duty. You killed that pussycat in as manly a way as anybody could’ve under the circumstances.”

Clay looked at him suspiciously. “What the hell are you talkin’ about?”

“That cat was a spy. You *had* to take a pot shot at it. It was a very clever German midget

dressed up in a cheap fur coat. So there was absolutely nothing brutal, or cruel, or dirty, or even—”

“God damn it!” Clay said, his lips thinned. “Can’t you ever be *sincere*?”

X felt suddenly sick, and he swung around in his chair and grabbed the wastebasket—just in time.

When he had straightened up and turned toward his guest again, he found him standing, embarrassed, halfway between the bed and the door. X started to apologize, but changed his mind and reached for his cigarettes.

“C’mon down and listen to Hope on the radio, hey,” Clay said, keeping his distance but trying to be friendly over it. “It’ll do ya good. I mean it.”

“You go ahead, Clay. . . . I’ll look at my stamp collection.”

“Yeah? You got a stamp collection? I didn’t know you—”

“I’m only kidding.”

Clay took a couple of slow steps toward the door. “I may drive over to Ehstadt later,” he said. “They got a dance. It’ll probably last till around two. Wanna go?”

“No, thanks. . . . I may practice a few steps in the room.”

“O.K. G’night! Take it easy, now, for Chrissake.” The door slammed shut, then instantly opened again. “Hey. O.K. if I leave a letter to Loretta under your door? I got some German stuff in it. Willy fix it up for me?”

“Yes. Leave me alone now, God damn it.”

“Sure,” said Clay. “You know what my mother wrote me? She wrote me she’s glad you and I were together and the whole war. In the same jeep and all. She says my letters are a helluva lot more intelligent since we been goin’ around together.”

X looked up and over at him, and said, with great effort, “Thanks. Tell her thanks for me.”

“I will. G’night!” The door slammed shut, this time for good.

X sat looking at the door for a long while, then turned his chair around toward the writing table and picked up his portable typewriter from the floor. He made space for it on the messy table surface, pushing aside the collapsed pile of unopened letters and packages. He thought if he wrote a letter to an old friend of his in New York there might be some quick, however slight, therapy in it for him. But he couldn’t insert his notepaper into the roller properly, his fingers were shaking so violently now. He put his hands down at his sides for a minute, then tried again, but finally crumpled the notepaper in his hand.

He was aware that he ought to get the wastebasket out of the room, but instead of doing anything about it, he put his arms on the typewriter and rested his head again, closing his eyes.

A few throbbing minutes later, when he opened his eyes, he found himself squinting at a small, unopened package wrapped in green paper. It had probably slipped off the pile when he had made space for the typewriter. He saw that it had been readdressed several times. He could make out, on just one side of the package, at least three of his old A.P.O. numbers.

He opened the package without any interest, without even looking at the return address. He opened it by burning the string with a lighted match. He was more interested in watching the string burn all the way down than in opening the package, but he opened it, finally.

Inside the box, a note, written in ink, lay on top of a small object, wrapped in tissue paper. He picked out the note and read it.

17, --- Road,
---, Devon
June 7, 1944

DEAR SERGEANT X,

I hope you will forgive me for having taken 38 days to begin our correspondence but, I have been extremely busy as my aunt has undergone streptococcus of the throat and nearly perished and I have been justifiably saddled with one responsibility after another. However I have thought of you frequently and of the extremely pleasant afternoon we spent in each other's company on April 30, 1944 between 3:45 and 4:15 P.M. in case it slipped your mind.

We are all tremendously excited and overawed about D Day and only hope that it will bring about the swift termination of the war and a method of existence that is ridiculous to say the least. Charles and I are both quite concerned about you; we hope you were not among those who made the first initial assault upon the Cotentin Peninsula. Were you? Please reply as speedily as possible. My warmest regards to your wife.

Sincerely yours,
ESMÉ

P.S. I am taking the liberty of enclosing my wristwatch which you may keep in your possession for the duration of the conflict. I did not observe whether you were wearing one during our brief association, but this one is extremely water-proof and shock-proof as well as having many other virtues among which one can tell at what velocity one is walking if one wishes. I am quite certain that you will use it to greater advantage in these difficult days than I ever can and that you will accept it as a lucky talisman.

Charles, whom I am teaching to read and write and whom I am finding an extremely intelligent novice, wishes to add a few words. Please write me as soon as you have the time and inclination.

HELLO HELLO HELLO HELLO HELLO
HELLO HELLO HELLO HELLO HELLO
LOVE AND KISSES CHARLES

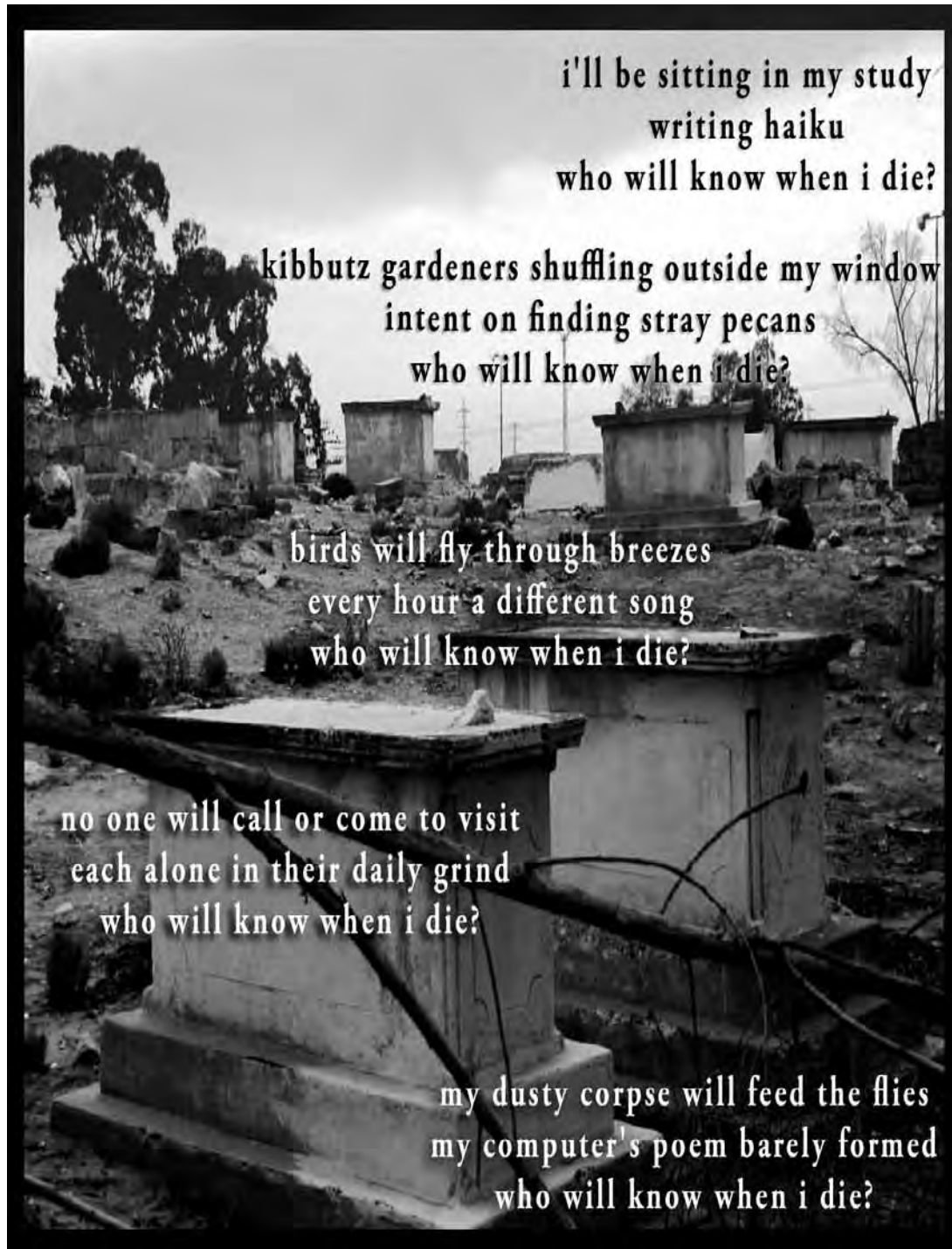
It was a long time before X could set the note aside, let alone lift Esmé's father's wristwatch out of the box. When he did finally lift it out, he saw that its crystal had been broken in transit. He wondered if the watch was otherwise undamaged, but he hadn't the courage to wind it and find out. He just sat with it in his hand for another long period. Then, suddenly, almost ecstatically, he felt sleepy.

You take a really sleepy man, Esmé, and he *always* stands a chance of again becoming a man with all his fac—with all his f-a-c-u-l-t-i-e-s intact.



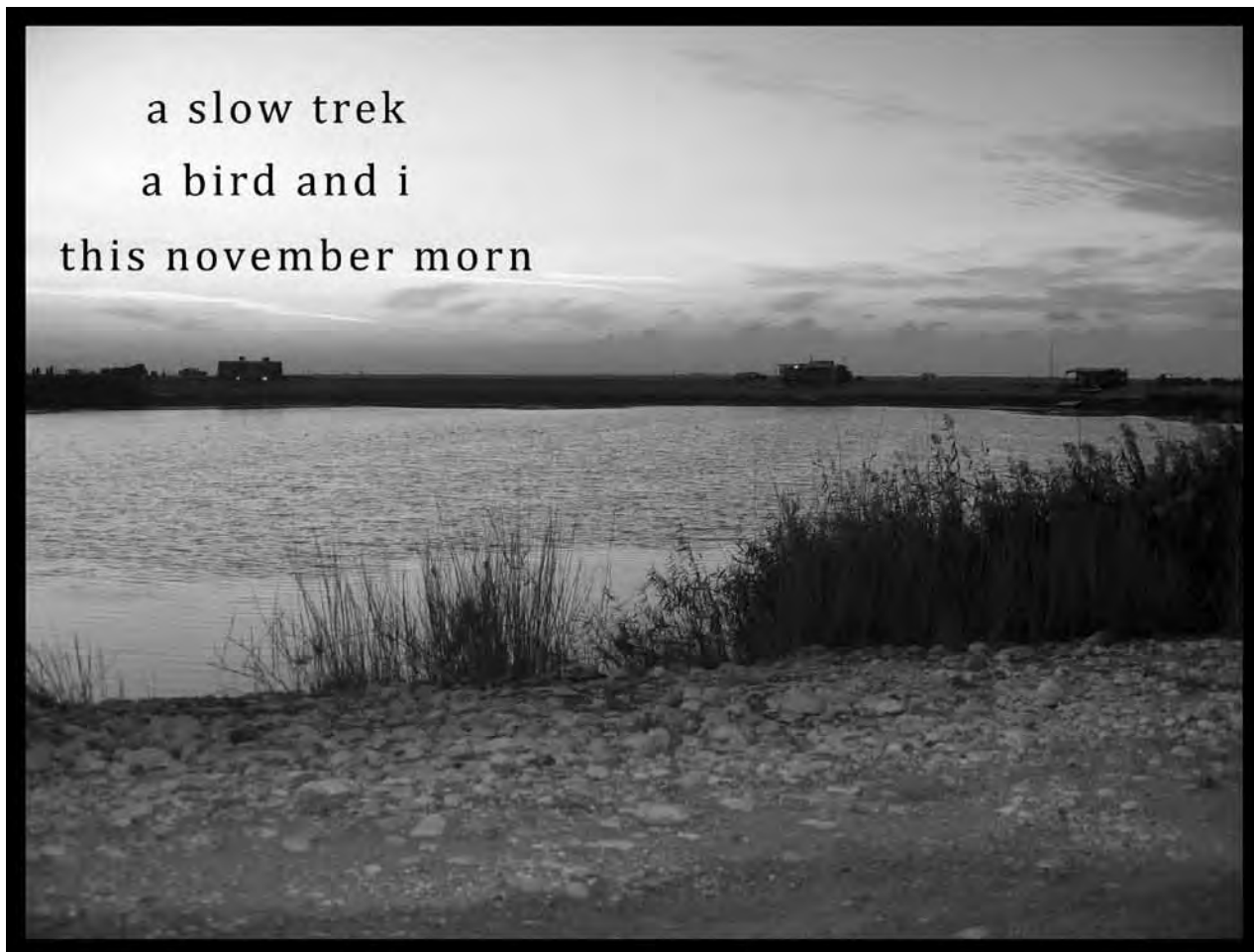


Judih Haggai



Judih Haggai

a slow trek
a bird and i
this november morn



Judih Haggai



Judih Haggai



Judih Haggai



the flux of the days
some search, some sit back and ponder

Iris Weinstein Haggai



Judih Haggai



Ralph Emerson



Horse Holiday

[Fiction]

The Riveredge Stables had looked in the telephone book like the best thing the city of Clinton had to offer for riding. As the cab pulled up in front of the place, Roy knew he had picked the poorest. Only because it was getting late did he decide against trying to find another. He paid the cab fare and walked up the roadway to the barn.

Despite the name Riveredge, the stable was located near city limits amidst small shops and shabby tenements. The barn was a long sagging garage-like building covered with green tarpaper. The barnyard where Roy stood was filled with old wagons and horse-drawn farm tools. Chickens and pigeons were roosting on most of them. Off to one side was an old Railway Express truck that had been converted into a horse van. Two white goats were tied to the rear bumper.

Roy walked up to the barn to a doorway marked Office. Seated on a grain box inside was a huge slob of a man dressed in tight jodhpurs, a green sport shirt, and knotty-laced army shoes. He looked at Roy.

"What can we do for you?"

"I'd like to rent a horse for an hour or so."

The man stared a bit more. "You alone?"

Roy felt like telling him to go to hell, but answered, "Yes."

The owner got up off the grain box. "Can you ride?"

"I've done some."

"English or Western?"

Roy was getting mad. "Cavalry."

The owner looked at Roy again; turned, spat, and glanced over the array of saddles hung on pegs. He took down an old officer's saddle and a dirty army blanket. These he set down on the grain box. He pointed to a notebook on the desk: "You got to sign out for a horse. Put your name and address on there."

Roy took the stub pencil that was tied to the book and made an entry.

The owner opened a door leading to the stable end of the barn. "Bill, come here!" A lanky hook-nosed youth came in. He was outfitted in stuff he must have thought the last word in fancy cowboy clothes. They were dirty but well creased.

"Take this saddle and put it on Duke. This gentleman is taking him out." The owner turned to Roy. "You sure you can ride? That's one of the best horses we got."

Roy nodded.

"It's two dollars an hour. If you're out overtime, it's time and a half. You bring that horse back sweat up, you got to walk him dry. You ride at your own risk."

Roy looked at him and said, "Thanks."

He walked into the stable part of the barn. It was a dark and dirty place. Nine horses

were tied up in straight stalls. All were in poor flesh. Most of them looked nicked-up and old. There was no hay in any of the mangers.

Roy watched Bill saddle up the horse he was to ride, a big gray with black points. If the horse had been up in flesh and clean it wouldn't have been a bad-looking animal. There was a Prescott brand on the near side of its neck: "D 27." Roy smiled. It was an old army horse, an officer's mount at that.

"How long have you had that horse?" he asked.

Bill slipped the halter off and started bridling.

"He come in this spring from Texas. He was the best cow pony on the D-27 Ranch." The western accent was practiced but still phony. Roy was going to set the kid straight about the brand but figured it would be a waste of time.

Bill led the horse outside and held him while Roy mounted.

The owner came out of the office. "Take it easy with that horse. Don't run him on the hard road." He paused, then took out a large pocket watch. "It's five-twenty now."

Roy nodded again. "Are there any bridle paths nearby?"

"You stay on Highland Street till you come to Elm, turn left and go straight about a mile. It will take you right into the park. Remember what I said about bringing back a sweaty horse."

Roy reined the horse out of the barnyard.

He was hardly out of sight of the stable when it felt to him that the horse was sore-footed forward. He dismounted and checked the hoofs for stones. There was nothing there. Roy thought the shoeing job alone was enough to blame for making the horse sore. He remounted and kneed the animal along.

He turned onto Elm, which was a residential street. The dogs there were used to horses and made no attempt to bark as he rode by, but he did stir up the notice of the kids. They met him from every yard with "Ride 'em cowboy!" and "Git up!" and "Hi-Ho Silver!"

At the park it was pleasant enough. Lots of trees, and few people at that hour. Roy followed a good dirt road that paralleled a meandering stream. He just walked the horse along. Any other gait was a sore effort. Roy wondered how long the stable figured this horse could be used without stopping altogether. Too bad the army had to give up horses. If the old brute was still government property, it would be turned out for a good rest and a chance to grow fat. Roy found himself getting madder and madder at the owner of the stable.

The trees gave way to an open meadow high in good grass. The stream branched off in several directions. Ahead there was a bar gate marking the edge of the park and the beginning of private land. Roy halted the horse, which lowered its head and pulled at the bit to grab a mouthful of grass. Roy let it have its head. He looked at his watch. It was quarter to six, time to start back.

Dismounting, Roy lowered the gate-rails and led the horse over them. He stood inside the gate for a couple of minutes letting the horse eat grass. Finally he unsaddled and unbridled the animal and gave him a slap on the rump. The horse cantered off a ways, stopped, turned, and looked at Roy.

"Go on!"

Roy watched the horse paw the ground, roll over a couple of times, and finally get up and gallop out of sight. Roy hung the saddle and bridle on the barway where they couldn't be missed, then walked off to where he judged the main road to town would be.

Ben Silverton, owner of the Riveredge Stables, got his equipment back that night. Bill his stable boy found it. It was four days before he got the horse back. It had been picked up in a town thirty miles to the north. There's also a new sign, lettered as poorly as the rest around Riveredge Stables, that reads:

Notice!

*Positive identification
must be shown before any
animal leaves the stable.*

The Management.

* * * * *





Haiku by Judih Haggai

Martina Newberry



Bad Manners

I don't know who to be angry with anymore.
 That's a lie.
 I *do* know
 but my rage can't find a release tunnel—
 something or somewhere to race through.
 I need to see someone with real power
 apply a tourniquet to the hemorrhaging
 of the mortally wounded places my country has stabbed.
 It is not enough to see the burning bodies on the news in High Definition;
 America, you must know that our backyard barbeques mask
 the smell of smoke across the planet. It is not enough to know
 that in my country there are mothers in jail for protesting the deaths
 of their children who were forced to kill other children in other countries—
 children who were told to kill them.
 Knowing is nothing
 Fury is nothing.
 Oh sweet America, I don't crave forgiveness for not singing "I Love Barney" songs
 with your babies when I know that the scent of *Khinta* and the taste of *Khubaz*
 have been stripped away from the noses and mouths of those you help to destroy.
 I'm not some remorseful woman in a shopping mall unable to grasp the notion
 of what belongs to whom. I know what is mine and what is not.
 The windows through which we watch the world are cleaner than our hands and
 the ghosts fleeing by those windows no longer care what languages they speak.
 Talking of how the rivers in Liberia became beds of gravel, and the hills of Sarajevo
 were too gouged and flattened for snow play, a poet said to me
 "All you can do is write it again and again until honor turns some of this around."
 There's a chance she was right and there's a chance that it's bullshit and can't be
 turned around. So, here is that place in the poem where my rage, my madness
 has made me teary and tired.

Listen please.
 It is not indigestion keeping you awake nights
 or the thoughts of a heart you broke
 in some fit of bad manners or microwaved lust. No,
 this insomnia you suffer is made of oil and blood blending.
 This insomnia is the total absence of Love as humans have known it.
 This is unabashed Knowing climbing into bed with you,
 putting its hands around your throat and squeezing
 until your heart bursts open and its pieces
 scatter over the world like petals.



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine [a new fiction]

Part Four. (Continued)

"Truth is a pathless land"
—Jiddu Krishnamurti, 1929.

cxiv.

Nothing goes away, nothing returns, (& here I am at a joint I left years ago, come here then jobless & heart broke, to sit privately & read & eat a little bit, what I could afford, comfort in this place, its trademarked anonymity but nobody troubled me then, hours I sat, I wrote, I struggled, then I'd gather myself & move along—

Returned to remember, & to carry on, to return, to remix, to renew—to see how I am here now in contrast—to see how here has changed—it has, it's been renovated—sports-themed now, go Blazers! it looks a little fancier—yet the Hispanics still run the place, still decent & friendly—now there's a TV & CNN on it, that cynical tool of a bloated self-obsessed media corporate bureaucratic establishment—I object to it yet some watch it who would not otherwise—still poor folks pass through—I've always moved easiest among them—fewer secret games, maybe, more upfront hungers—not sure—not meaning a romantic take on anyone—

Just came here for a sweet hour or two hid some, & to still this place in anew—

carry on—)

Nothing goes away, nothing returns. What other answer, what question? A smart cheek's sheen by ruby lamp & what the wish years ago to admire & know? How many cheeks, how often the wish?

How faith lets go, a lash at a time (she knew this time she could not hustle her way out & maybe better for it) (at first she had been tied to a bed, belly down, hands & feet cuffed to posts, & the light had been adjusted & there was a dimming smoke & light touches & she had held still yet pliant but there was no face to see, to know, & the gentle touch had terrified & aroused her (then she had been left with a costume & a warm bowl of stew in an empty, dim room but she could not trust her eyesight for the room seemed endless & so maybe she was dim (lets go, replaced by cloakless melodies in the wind (the costume was leather & chains, not meant to clothe but to highlight nudity, neither her ass nor her nipples, nor even her tender cunt covered by it (& she ate after resisting, ate & ate, & licked the bowl & wanted more (by

questions in the spines of broken books & answers scrawled above (& she did not know what she was after while, dressed for the fucking in this endless place she could not know, the light always a murky smoke, she thought to escape since nothing bound her, but to what? (you are here for a reason, I know it, they did, not Bobbie but you, maybe you'll find Maya, maybe they want you both, maybe you're better than Maya (I'll be better than Maya, I'll survive (those many nights with toys, *oh my lovely toys, testing each new one, a little bigger inside me, riding, riding, sometimes I would gag my own mouth for how deeply I wanted to moan & scream, **nobody fucking understood***).

Want sniffs by, on streets, in cars, dogs the eyes (I've been walking for days now, Maya, I am approaching you with my answer, the one I prayed for, I sunk down deep for my answer to who-I-am-&-what-I-am-to-you, I am not that fake thing that carried you from those Woods, & vowed to protect you ever after (Nothing gone, nothing returning (I understand better how I must do, every inch of you is holy, the dreams are clear, the blood, the knife, the moonlight, the Woods burning all around you, my body is less for how badly I need the answer, have you ever rent yourself & consumed by fire? *Have you you fucking bitch?* (Calm, calm now. Remember the world, its lies, its lies in every direction, its armored man-beasts clad to enforce its lies, its lies built into temples, into vast institutions of worship, of Moloch (remember you were one among them, teaching of math & music (remember what you had & what they took (because you had, because they took, Maya now come (come & gone, but will come again (and again and again (Want roots pink & black deep, rears high between broken walls & their lover fists (took away what you took, what was yours & what you did to him who took away & how it did not help (how Maya will burn this all away & burn the rest (yes for music & mathematics are not the answer, nor their coupling, no (those mornings, those dear, sweet mornings, that taste, her taste, her sound, her promise, the way she turned with the sheen's shifting hours, the answers that approached (lies, or at best distractions, waste, see it now, see it for what it was, distractions & waste (in dear, gone, fragile hours where blooms scattered poor pale rooms (it was more than this, I met them, we talked, there was no time, no space, it's why I needed her, why I really needed her (but why did they not tell me: Fire? Why nod about my music & mathematics? I would have burned her flesh, consumed her bones (& I will now, I've tested it, Maya, I would not be coming to claim you for this if I had not tested this (the dreams still try to distract me, & the lies of the world (coming, Maya, coming Maya, coming), the directionless rooting hands. No more.

*Nothing going, nothing returned. "Stand." "Why?" "Stand." Stands. "I am taller than you expected." "Yes. I guess so." "Let it fall." "All?" "Yes, I want to see." It all falls. The skin is pale, roseate pale. The torso is slender. "Pose." "Pose!" "Fucking pose!" She leans, allows her curves to frame her, cups her breasts. Looks upon looking. "Am I the heroine or just your pretty young whore?" "Yes." "Can I say no?" "It doesn't matter." "Are you going to f**k me?" "It doesn't matter." "Will you help me?" "It doesn't matter."*

Maya stares. "You broke off into this book to do something. Was it just to take me?" "It doesn't matter."

She thinks. "A beast of empires built in the fetid nest of that equation."

I nod.

She resumes slowly. "Boys are clad in steel & pushed off in columns." Dylan appears, briefly,

ghostly, a soldier, a mute face, a soldier. Maya watches, convulses without moving. I wait.

"girls dress it tight & roseate, smile shufflingly" I nod, I lean

"dress for me. slowly." She nods. We agree.

Her breasts are small & round, her nipples a pale pink, they've known scarce a touch, bear yet no milk, she dresses them in a creamy garment, shows me, shows me closer. Her pussy is lightly covered in blonde, tastes deep, tastes like a warm thunderstorm, a like creamy garment, both translucent. Her jeans are faded, patched with rainbows & peace signs, tight around her ass, I check, she waits. Her shirt is loose, long, tie-dyed, a long leopard resembling Jimi Hendrix on stage, plays or roars orgasmic, a shifting image. Boots leather, very protective, a bag, knapsack, a leather jacket. "Am I ready?" she smiles.

"Why did you come to find me." "Here you are." "But why?" "I'm the key or conduit" "I don't know. I'm not so much him anymore." "You're not married to Rebecca." "I don't know." "Decide." "I don't think so." "What are you writing in that book?" "Not much yet." "You're going to oppose him." "How? I can't." "You will be first. Before Dylan. You will prepare me. When you are ready I will go." "No." "We will work together but I know what you need as we do." "Oppose him how?" "He would never end this." "I don't know." "We will end it." "No. I can't." "You'll come with me. Samantha too but not yet." "Why?" "Not ready. No." "No." "It doesn't matter." "No." "It doesn't matter."

No.

It doesn't matter.

No.

She reads the manuscript, makes me sit & wait while she reads it, not mine but his, Labyrinthine, the one he imposes on this world, what contains this world from without, she reads its raggy length of pages, I see her resisting it, see her . . . consuming it. It is her world, she has known none other, & here it is as pages in a book, not the touch & sight & noise around her but pages, it is monstrously fascinating & I wonder at the power in all this, what I'm broken off from what I still possess—

Whatever I came for can be so easily compromised, I see that—of course the characters in this story fascinate me, of course seeing Maya reading scant feet from me affects me different from her as words on paper—

I watch her eyes shift in thought & emotion, aware that her awareness of me fades in & out—she's looking for clues, for intent—

"You won't find it"

"It's a game. An elaborate game."

"Without victors, rules, ends."

"No."

"You're beautiful."

"I'm written that way."

"I think you're every smiling hippy girl I've met or seen over the years. Long after I knew you had no secret to tell me. No solution."

"Then what do I have now?"

"Well, you have a little bit of me in you."

"Is that the sadness?"

"It's the sense of change & passing. Loss."

"Why all this?"

"No last pages. Why bother? It's one long fucking story. It ends when I do. I'm not going to stop writing. I don't know or like anything else as much."

"I don't accept this."

"Why?"

"Stories have an end, even when there will be more."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Maybe just so you can shut the book & bring it back to the library!"

I laugh. "You're not in a book that has a place in libraries."

"Why?"

"I'm not interested in that."

"What then?"

"I don't know anymore."

"I'll do whatever you want."

"I know. But what I want is for you to love Dylan."

"Why? Isn't he you? A younger you?"

"Maybe. But not really. I'd like it to be otherwise."

"What is the game?"

"The game is *want*, Maya.

Want to know. Want to learn.

What to love. Want to be loved.

Want to dance. Want to control.

Want to live forever."

"That's the playing field. What is the game?"

I nod. She's smart. She asks my questions.

"The game seems to be how to live without sure answers yet navigate mortal, fleshly years.

What to attend, what to stress.

What to believe, even in passing.

What to value, even in passing.

How to respond to the fervent claims of others.

Believe in God, believe in country.

Believe in family. Believe in truth.

Believe in compassion & kindness.

Believe."

"Why not believe?"

"Why not? Or why? To be conscious, self-conscious, is to be able to question. To question is a power & a curse. An affliction. Answers seem dangerous, the beginnings of disease & decay. The beginnings of sentiment & nostalgia. Some weak yearn for justice or justification in one's years. A validation, a worth in the suffering & a glory in the lighter hours. Carving meaning into past years & circumscribing how coming ones will be judged. Will be *lived*."

She looks at me & for a long passing moment I am tempted.

"Go, Maya."

"No. Wait."

"Take it & go," pointing to *Labyrinthine*.

She pauses, & I let myself taste for a moment every inch, every curve, every warm



breath, & then I stop.

"You know the playing field. You know the game. Learn how to play better. That's your charge. I'll see you again when you do.

"You want answers? I have none. Go find them, or something better. Go!" I nod.

Preacher in his garden, he appears here sometimes, fairly sure he is sleeping, fairly sure, hums, remembers, this is what happens here

"You look like her, a little"

"Who?"

"She was blonde too. I was a young man, she was young too, I haven't since, nobody surely knows this. But I am dreaming so I can confide you."

Maya nods. This is what is necessary. He is weeding among flowers that tinkle & glow. She gently takes his basket & holds it out for the weeds he plucks, unsure why.

"I was her first & she was not mine. It was sweet. Even when it wasn't anymore, in my heart, in my loins, it was still sweet." He nods. His face shifts old to young & back again. She nods & listens.

"I could tell you I've spent all these years trying to get back to her. I could tell you I opposed my dearest brother on one salient point & it was this: he sought redemption through vengeance & I sought it through compassion. I could tell you I've been celibate & true & you could say what of all the others since? I could say similar looking things may not be in any meaningful way the same." He nods. She nods.

"You look like her that first time. I was her teacher but she learned nothing in particular from me then. I'd like to think in absence we taught each other so much more. Does that mean anything? No. Not to you. Not yet. Maybe hints. Absence is the great teacher. The cumulation of years. The strange mix & re-mix of memories until you taste even your dearest as new & terrifying."

He pauses & his expression raises her to him, willing, hungry, panting, & yet he holds her lightly before him, a butterfly on his fingertip.

"Nothing returns, nothing goes away. There are a few hours from this life's raggy fringe, its known paths where woes fought the day, the many wars within."

Lets her free, flutters her aloft where a wind impossibly carries her & passes her along, & there is a lightness crossing her heart as she goes, & an old song whose first & last words she hums

no way out but through
no way out but through
no way out but through

Nothing returning, nothing going. “There were distant lights where a faith taught a love or a god or a fine, subtle dream dwelled.” Bowie nods, he knows many variations on this speech, Preacher is haunted again, sometimes it won’t happen for months but then it will smack him & here they are in the garden in Preacher’s dream, sort of in Preacher’s dream, in truth Bowie is not sure, & this time he sniffs something pink & young, recently gone—

“Was she—?”

“No, Freddy, of course not. The other one. *His*, though he has no valid claim on such a creature.”

“Where is—?”

“Aloft, where she should be. She won’t stay long, though, as she should. Her heart is tangled & heavy.”

“Is she the code? The key? The conduit? *Fuck*, Preacher!”

Preacher picks up the basket Maya had been holding here. “You know all this is too strange & malleable for me to answer you. She is important, but knowing that means nothing.

“Look, that great bird! You’ve seen him before, golden & powerful. He’s important too.”

“Tell me something useful, then.” Preacher is silent, looking in his basket. Bowie waits, waits.

“Sometimes things change & change & we get to thinking they will solve eventually. There will be a settling, & clarity. We keep thinking that as things change & change again, think at some moments we’re close, closer.”

“And we’re not?”

“I’m not saying that.”

“What then?”

There was a night, maybe two, when moonlight crossed intention, when a face drew near & the great hid wings of the world opened out, gestured, bid, bid again!—

“None of it may be enough. It may never be enough.”

“What then?”

“I can’t say for certain, but you should know.”

“Preacher, what the fuck!”

“That may be all you get”

—And you looked, decided, went, or held, believing through your hunger that other such nights would come—

“Do you understand me?”

“No.”

“You don’t want to.”

“Not yet.”

Nothing’s returned, nothing’s gone, Bowie takes Preacher’s offered basket.

Damned unsure yet keep moving—.

cxv.

Want is ancient & this setting hour new, moves to build, change, destroy, moves without prophecy or history, moves all.

The hunger is mystery to know, to touch, to hope. Fear of diminish, quiet or noisy fade, & where does it all go when gone?

Who bold enough to ask this?

Who wise enough to answer?

"There's nothing but the work & how the music waits you to follow. Choose to work, to follow. Choose to sing. Not knowing why, but a feeling, a humming pulse deep in, choose to keep singing."

"Why?"

"No answer but the open door waiting your passage. Breathe, relax, & pass through. One song's room to the next. That's all."

Maya keeps reading. Maya keeps listening. Maya keeps moving.

"Crazed various thing, how rat's meat tastes to a starving tongue, how jewels soft glow an eager virgin's breast in satin moonlight"

Maya giggles. Maya keeps moving.

"Crazed various thing, ferment, breath, dream, may burn your city to prove a faith's word, burn the seas themselves, no answer, no escape."

Maya keeps moving. Nothing else.

*"Crazed various thing! What electrifies this dominion of dust! Blows through a thousand centuries, all matters, all passes! **FUCK ME FOR ONCE, MAYA!**"*

Maya wiggles. Maya eludes. Maya keeps moving.

Want squeezes hand & heart with urge to possess, swallow & consume the laws of men in blaze & renting cloth. Maya nods, this is what makes sense, what she can use.

"Use how?"

"Perspective"

"Meaning?"

"No safety in any of this."

"Did you think otherwise?"

"No. I missed those years, didn't I?"

"Yah."

"Crazed various thing, what drives the blade into molecule's depths, what builds great edifices from which kings cry for final war; girded by preachers knowing a tender god kisses fine this cause & then all to the tankards for courage & fecund thighs of willing slaves"

Maya flinches, Maya keeps moving, Maya sure knows what value & what cost.

"?"

"Yes."

"?"

"What travels away & away?"

"?"

"Are you unsure or don't you wish to say?"

"How stalled are you right now?"

cxvi.

"Beauty is sexual," as though one could define or equal the other yet it's been said, many times, now reck it on this bathroom wall, written carefully in a ragged space between the cocks & cunts & assholes & whores phone numbers, & in two colors no less, black letters & red outlines, the red ink from a leaky pen so splotches, yet give a closer look to how like blood those splotches are, how like declarative violence, how like it, & a chance moment it's dusk & the high window above this single pisser scatters light through this cement room & some kind of refracting sheen hits this spot *thesewords&thewholethingpulseslike efuckifIknowwhatisthisacarefullymarkedconfession?whatelsecanibe?itpulsesnow&isthattheunevennessofthecementorhowitislacqueredormaybestraysplashesofpisswetnthedrying&again&thelight&thetwo colorsofink&thecocks&cunts&assholesthat surroundit whatthefuckwhensomethingsocasualbegin stofeellikemoremorethanconfessionmorethaninstructionsamoredesperatemanmightcallitrevelation&trytofigureitout&followitalong&Idon'tthinkIamthatmanbutIdon'tknowthatI'mnot* —Bowie breathes & wonders what the fuck here is but it seems singly true he's been in here for hours & hours—

Breathes. Again. Again. It's familiar like a remembered dream, bites from an inner distance like that. Closer but not close enough. Looks again at the wall's writing. "Beauty is sexual." Who? Some poet. Those years of reading poets, of really bothering over human wisdom.

The shrooms, somewhere, laugh. "It was sad giving it up. Sad later. When I'd see someone sitting with a book cradled, feeding, feeding brightly."

"You want it back?"

"Not everything gained is a comfort."

"Or lost?"

"Fuck it. A trick. I know you don't like our language much."

"It's like wearing cuffs & blindfolds & choking airless & starving to death"

"Funny. Bastards."



Pushes them away, thinks. This was before Preacher. He was practically someone else living in some other world.

Sam. Shit. Sam. This was the pisser in the hole they drank in. So long ago. He loved her. He loved her as he would not find possible any more.

Did they fuck? What counts as fucking? He never used to think of things like that.

A punky girl before that got hip again. Scrawny, avoided food for days til suddenly they'd be at an all-night buffet loading up plates til thrown out.

Her story was so confused he never knew it straight.

Did they fuck?

Why here now? Which now is it? Looks in mirror. Fucking Bowie, beat to shit beautiful with his own brain stick. Preacher said that. Bowie nodded, one of his favorite possessions.

The door back to the bar doesn't fit right in its frame. A trick to it, push left, shove right, swings wide easy.

Sitting there at her place at the bar. Even drinking from her special glass the barman kept on a shelf for her.

Her hair is cropped short, never seen it short at all.

Play through, Bowie. Nod & play the fuck through.

She smiles, he loses some years. A flashing glance, not so scrawny.

"Gonna drink with me, Bowie?"

"You never called me that"

"Still like your Turkey wild?"

Barman pours. Tall one.

"How are you?" retches from his lips.

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry?"

"I thought I knew shit & I liked to talk shit & I treated you like shit. And later my life went to shit. I did it to me, to you, to others. I'm sorry."

Bowie studies his glass, does not sip yet.

"I took off for years, Bowie. You could have found me in Reno stripping for awhile there. It felt good for awhile. I didn't know how much I'd hated being poor until I had so much cash. I whored too for awhile but that wasn't good. Dancing I felt present, like it mattered. Fucking men for money I'd disappear. Nobody made me. I was treated pretty well, nobody beat up on me. But I'd disappear & that was wrong. They paid for a girl not a ghost."

She drinks hard, taps for another. "Then it gets weirder. I fell in love with one of the other dancers. Fell hard, like a fucking little puppy. Alissandra. I'd never really made love to a woman before, not like with her, not close.

"We had so much fun, pulled in so much cash when we danced together, made the patrons laugh, enjoy themselves like they never do. So unhappy mostly, hungry & empty & paying us to fill it with out bodies, I'd try to tell Alissa what I saw, what I felt, but she knew. We danced together & something happened to them & us & nobody knew then & I still don't know why now. We didn't even whore any more alone or together. Only a few strangers even asked. The regulars knew better, knew the gift in our dance. Some even took the feeling home & gave it to their wives & girlfriends."

Kills her drink. Nods another.

"Hell, the place got sold & that was that. New owners wanted moneymaking legs tits

& cunts. Alissa said we're leaving & we were gone. Remember that movie *Thelma & Louise*? Yah, two crazy women on the road. We drove to the coast & then up it a ways. Found a town & a little house & a garden & a fucking gazebo to drink beers at night with our fucking neighbors.

"She wanted a baby. Wanted one with me. I said yes because I loved her & I wasn't going to ever stop."

Shakes off another. "Later." Silent like death. "Well, it happened. But it was over between us. I left before he was old enough to know I'd ever been gone.

"Don't ask me why! Don't say a fucking word. I drove off til my old ass car collapsed & then I took a Greyhound & I came back home & he was there & alone & I climbed up on his hips like I used to after she'd finally left & I rode him til every drop came out."

Bowie doesn't breathe. She means her ex-stepfather, the one who'd married & divorced her mother & about a year later, on her sweet sweet 16th birthday, Sam always claimed when blind drunk, he fucked her raw into womanhood & they kept together & broke apart a few times. She might have still been fucking him when they'd been close before. Bowie'd met him once or twice. Mechanic, body of a bull, mind of a very nasty tyrant.

"I left him too but it wasn't sad or nasty. We've talked on the phone a few times." Pauses. "I've talked to Alissa once."

Now takes her next drink. "I even found God for awhile, Bowie. It was like, OK, what's left? Anyway—" She gets quiet. Story stops short.

"Why are we back here, Sam?"

"I'm not sure," she lies, first one he knows she's told.

"Why aren't you drinking? You used to keep up for awhile back then."

He nods. Does not sip.

She sighs. "I know you're mixed deep in some shit."

Bowie says nothing.

"You know a place called Red Dog? Chain of hippie restaurants started in the '60s?"

Nods briefly.

"I waitressed at one. This was years ago the first time & a few times since when I needed money. Like a cult, you can always go back once you've been."

Pause.

"Why are we back here, Sam?"

"You can stop. There's time."

"Stop what?"

"There's a way out of this, Bowie. I can show you."

"You never called me Bowie."

She smiles, strangely. "Think we have one more fuck in us? I've got more to tell but not here."

He stands. "I've got plenty of fucks left in me. But not with you." Feels his heart crack some as he turns to walk away.

"You're just putting her in more danger. You must know this."

"Who?" Turns back, anger climbing over old regret.

"The girl. She doesn't fuck you like I did but you're older now, a slower step in the bedroom."

Catches himself. Turns away & walks out.

“Best you can do is leave it all & walk away alone. At least take her. You won’t like what’s coming.”

cxvii.

Wherefrom hints, brokenly, whereto. This, genes & chance. As he walks away, Bowie isn’t thinking of Sam any longer, or whatever the *fuck* that was back there, whatever, wherever, he’s remembering his father, & that’s worse than Sam in every possible way—
So much love, hate, indifference to cook the little soup of regret in his heart—

He came & went twice, & seemed like two men, not one father but two. When Bowie was a boy, he was a mystery, someone so potent he followed Bowie into his dreams, long years after he’d left. Not afraid of him precisely, call it awe if given choice of one word. Call the feeling toward him longing, perhaps that clarifies some.

Came back years later, no longer enigma in flesh. Smoked his cigarettes too short, talked of nothing but the present hour, the recent meal, the dull quality of the air. Broken, but that’s no fine word for it, more gone than those intervening years.

The picture was incomplete, a formula missing that vital signifier, maybe more than one. And then—he was gone again. Less explanation than the first time. Dead? In an asylum?

“Unkindly missing in body but wedged still in his mesmerized son’s heart” was how Preacher put it once. Bowie growled & snapped at those words, but did not disagree.

He knew the people who loved him—Preacher, Gretta, Christa if told more—would try to place his father’s presence/absence/influence in context—smart people but what a temptation! The spy business was perfect for a man shot through with unresolved enigmas in his own life—like most everything else, it seemed to work logically until it didn’t, & then proceeded to unravel worse than least gain.

Bowie uses skills to arrive back at Luna T’s for a time. Doesn’t hurt to have been a mushroom, to have one still as an eye.

Ready to see Gretta, Christa, ready to try a new thing, but neither are present. Not exactly.

Mr. Bob the barman points. “In there. Way in there.” Nods, no judgment in his eyes. Feels good.

“Are the OK?”

“Of course. You left them here.”

Bowie sits more settled on his stool. Mr. Bob nods, settles too.

“I saw someone tonight from a long time ago.”

Another nod.

“It was more like . . . a vision. I have more to do far from here.”

Silence. “She was with me when I was young. Then she went away. But something’s left over.”

“Something’s always left over, bud.”

Bowie nods. Suddenly talks some more.

“There was a night, years later, I was in a city, alone, a hotel. I was following someone,

he was in the next room, with a prostitute. I could hear him going at it with her. Some kind of really kinky shit. He was the deadly serious kind, even getting his rocks off, but she was young, laughing. Sounded like it anyway.

"I had a bottle of bourbon & I had some porn on the TV. Strange, I found myself wanting to connect with him but I didn't want a whore. I didn't know if I would have to kill him & maybe this added to it. I was depressed thinking of what I might have to do & here he was in the next room, fucking her in some guttural tongue crying out. His demons all exposed, her picking up a couple of bills for riding along. Me, my bottle, my gun, the porn on TV. The walls had two pictures on them, the same one, nearly, an egg falling off a table, in a dimly lit room.

"Bang! Bang! went the headboard against my wall as he really got into it & she only laughed more.

"Suddenly, no impetus, nothing, I was thinking about my father & felt like he was dying at that hour, somewhere far away, he was sick & his hour had come.

"I was sad. Everything meant less, I sat there withdrawing into this feeling until I wasn't present any longer. All that was left was that falling egg, those two pictures, not quite the same, & it came to me in a shoddy way that I had dreamed of that egg or something like it.

"The noise in the other room had stopped, I knew this & didn't care. They were talking, maybe smoking a cigarette, settling up. I didn't care. The first time that room's door opened & shut, I didn't act. Probably her. Then the door opened & shut again, & it was him. I didn't care, really fucking didn't.

"It was that egg I wanted to catch it. It was me who had knocked it off the table, I'd pitched a stone at it & now it was falling & I was realizing what I'd done. I was trying to catch it. I had to.

"I didn't know he'd died, no reason rationally to think it, or think of him.

"And why would it matter? But it did. And my quarry got away. First time it had happened to me, on purpose. I learned later it happens all the time, the longer you're in the business. But that was my first."

Bowie nods, pats Mr. Bob warmly on his muscular forearm, & parts him.

"Don't say I was here but watch them."

Or maybe Mr. Bob just imagines later he hears that as the man leaves.

cxviii.

She didn't know it would be like this & still wonders if it's so. There was another world, another life, back there, back when, & it was a struggle,

he said, "too many gold coins in your head & nowhere to spend, & they pile up coldly year by year"

She nods, wondering quietly, when he's gone some nights, how she spends them better now, or if much at all—

And yet—and yet—there are moments—he talks to her—he talks deep into her—he talks to places in her she'd hardly known before but in dreams—places surely nobody else imagined or cared about—yet he goes to them easily—does not charge as another man might, or simply take as many would—

No—his purposes are not that easy or blunt—he knows, he teaches—she listens,



disagrees if she wills, no rancor in it—*none*—

But he knows things & she listens because her mind full of unspent gold coins will have no less—

Calls the world an effect, how it leans in, for a touch or a coin, something in purse or pants, she cringes a little but nothing in it. He smiles & she relaxes. And she doesn't.

"Something trades back a heavy promise called God, or a sate of loins, or loneliness, maybe a song in green."

"Songs in green," she says. "I dream those."

He nods. Perhaps he knows already but his way isn't to treat dialogue like battle.

"Worse," he continues, "world does not lead in, the hours pass silent on a carriage, in café, a park, muted barks through rented walls—

Jazz breathes in, twice, something happens, there is a smell of exhaust, & baked bread, opens her eyes—

a city. What . . . ? No place she knows, she's sitting in a café courtyard at a black metal table, there are people around her, talking, know her—what—

one—no—her sister? no—this isn't real—she's in a shiny room in that hotel, really, come on—

"It's OK, Jazzy"—she smiles, that dear, frustrating, silly-little-sis-but-I-love-you smile—"don't be nervous" she whispers—"these are my new college friends, I've told them you're cool"

One eyes her & Jazz starts a little, peeking down, fair amount plain to view & her jeans feel water colored on—eyes her, then his gaze drifts easily away & she finds herself wanting it back—she listens but nothing makes sense so she looks beyond this courtyard, to the traffic crowding by, the old stone buildings across the street—a street musician starts up on the sidewalk—

her sister sitting right there & yet—

"if you keep chasing me you will find trouble, Jazzy—I was there when the White Woods burned down long ago—they're gone—I didn't survive—you did—I made sure—I love you"

she turns confused—what the hell was that?

"Which, then, you ask, grows a heart kinder again, unclenches those still-grabbing fists no longer a babe's?"

"Where is she?"

"Who?"

"*My sister!*"

"I've told you, I don't know."

"*Where is she?*"

“Sit down, Jasmine”

Her wrist feels the cuff, & the long chain. The pretty red dress with the side slit up high on her thigh. The sheer black hosiery beneath.

“Who?”

“Sit”

“What?”

“Sit.”

She sits.

“Neither resisting nor blandly yielding will win my favor.”

Says nothing.

“I know you hurt. And hunger.”

Fuck, what has changed? The room is thickening with want. What she wears is worse than naked. A blunt invitation, not the helplessness of a weaker combatant.

“Stand.” She does.

“Pose.” She knows this means a shift of hips, hands cupping her breasts, wet lips.

“Again.” She adjusts her straps, lets one fall halfway down her shoulder.

He nods. The room strangely relaxes.

“You understand.”

“No” she says, risking all.

“Good. Honesty pleases me.”

“Tell me.”

“He passed you along to me. Maybe I can help.”

She’s quiet.

“You thought there would be no cost because I spoke kindly & did not brutalize you immediately. Waits.

“There’s always a cost, Jasmine.”

“Will you help me find my sister?”

“I’ll help you reach the White Woods.”

“She said—I heard—they burned down—”

“Nothing destroys them—nothing’s like that—we can’t”

His voice is crackling, mingles with static like a distant radio station, what? where?

“Nearer the window? That’s good. The morning light on your skin is luminous”

A large room, seems real enough, her hair is down, arranged to look careless, she wears a long silk scarf, sky-blue like her eyes, it wraps around her. He is painting her portrait on a large canvas, the one from the café courtyard—

“where’s my sister?”

“You told me she went shopping with everyone else. You wanted to see my studio? Yo offered to pose? Is something wrong?”

What’s wrong is the absence of any concern in his voice. His sunburnt face ranges over her with a casual rage, like he would hurt her if he cared enough to—

“what store?” she whispers.

“Um, I’m not sure. I think she said the Coop?”

Jazz nods, & decides. Lets the long scarf fall. Risks all, again.

He starts.

“Are you going to hurt me?”

“No. No.” Pause. “No! I love you, Jazz! Why do you do this?” He moves near her, awkwardly.

“You can’t explain why I’m here, can you?”

“You’re staying with your sister in North Cambridge? She’s showing you around & we met? You told her you were staying awhile? Why do I have to keep reminding you?”

He’s scared.

“My sister is in the White Woods. She never got out. They never burned down. Am I there? Is this somewhere in the White Woods?”

“She told me about that. It happened when you were younger. She was kidnapped, & you were too but you both made it out. You’re OK, Jazz.”

Jazz stands, angry, bluntly naked. “Will you tell me if I get into your bed with you?”

“Tell you what? You’ve slept in my bed quite a few times.” He’s angry but still a few feet away. Angry & scared still.

She leans down to retrieve her long scarf & affixes it around her body again, notices a set of pink sneakers & slips into them, walks out his door to his protests. Slams the door behind her.

I’m in the White Woods now, he promised me he would help me. I’m here & I’m going to find her. Whatever this is, I will find her.

cxix.

In this dream, he was watching a man cry out unheeded to a fast moving crowd on a city street—he had much to say & not the usual God-mongering—

but he was failing & he grew very frustrated & angry & he acted from this anger, & his power was harmful—

He touched strangers & reduced them to gobs of shit, small soft balls, & these he rolled together to create a single larger & larger ball, touch & add, touch & add, the ball now like a large, heavy balloon he pushed down the many streets to the waterfront, to the docks, touching more along the way until he came to the edge of the dock & pushed the ball into the water, it fell with a heavy splash & sunk deep & deeper, slowly disintegrating, freeing all those souls from what had come before & nothing now to come, nothing at all

He cried to the splash, to the harbor as a whole, to the sunset, to the city, to all who might listen & the many who would not:

“I dreamed you’ll find it underneath, response to the preacher waving his tome & pointing to a sky rigged with explain! Underneath! Where the pretty faces & spangling nights devolve to plain chaos, to flesh’s consume & decay!”

He pauses, listens for anything like the response he’d want, none, nothing, & resumes:

“The hungers & their statuary, the music equal to deep manless jungles & onyx fractures of urban despair! Underneath, tickled in unsure thighs & muscular gestures to the stars alike!

The pain! Neither source nor explain!”

A girl passes, curious, dragged by her large dog, she is pinkly clad & slenderly curvy, the years have not choked her short of juice yet. She slows but her dog pulls her harder & her curious look diminishes him.

“Ecstasy!” he calls after her. “Where not fruited on one smile’s tree! Underneath! I dreamed you’ll find why this war, & the next, why men roar & wish to call it language! Wish to call it song! Wish to call a later hour revelation’s, willing live in time & law at all!”

She finds her way home with her dog, disturbed, distracted, there was something back there, & the evening’s cartoons & hash pipes do not dismiss or distance it for her.

She undresses for bed, as always before the open window & the nameless one who watches her, who breathes brokenly as her pink sweater, her lace bra, her jeans, her panties, her long pause, her lingering pose, her hint of a smile, & eventually the nightie with a teddy bear & some thing dirty written in numeric code about her belly, & she falls into bed, legs parted, the lights off, the candles, the music, the drift, the dream, ahh the dream:

the man at the harbor is in the city’s downtown, crying out his words, crying for all:

“I dreamed you’ll find it underneath, a comfort will not abandon you in your hungriest years, will assure you that no man’s hand forever clouds the skies, & that indeed he roots like all in the same bloody muck!”

Cries, smiles, waves his hand openly, mercifully, peacefully, this is his hard life’s dearest message, this for all of them & none listen, not a one, *she listens, her thighs moisten, her lips part, she whimpers wanting, badly wanting, badly wanting, is this possible? This much want? Where is all this from, this blind roaring ache in her belly, this shift & crackle in her loins, who is he to her, what has happened, how do they? Will they? Have they? Ahh fuck she comes so hard in this dream, never had, never knew what or how, o fucking god what are you to me what am I to you what is this?*

*Please please please please please
please Preacher please Preacher
please Preacher pleasepleaseplease
o god fuck please——*

xxx.

In strange service these many years, & how it come to & what it is—

“What purpose?” I ask the Beast in dreams, we prowling & pursuing each other awhile.
“To what purpose?”

“Everywhere is the White Woods. Every hour is *TripTown* & **RemoteLand**. Some eat others.”

We move, apart but aware of each other, into the Underneath, where borders fall down
“undifferentiation?”

“No.”

“What then?”

“Where all roots.”

Silence. Tick. Tick.

Resuming: “A butchered torso crosses the bridge to her door at dusk, removes her parcel of fruit & lays by her weapon, her walls silken with thoughts for revenge, & memories of every cat, & the dead teacher who was kind, gave her what she wanted, many books, tender



hours, & compassion.”

—must be dead. But I was never quite sure. All these years later I wonder more than I let myself back then. Back then I was pure act-&-react. I’d loved him. I’d given my heart & body to him. He had tried to kill me & failed. I’d killed him. I know it. At least I did.

Why would you come for me now? You cost me my legs. I’m old now & nobody sees me as a person anymore. My blood is old & sick too.

It’s been so long since I’ve felt anything for anyone. Yet I do now.

They don’t keep me from going out, the nurses, & I have an electronic pendant around my neck; for trouble I press its button, & they save me.

Save what’s left for a short while longer.

I remember you & I don’t. Blurry images but more in touch, sound, smell. You were not a handsome man. Not tall, not muscular. You read books & didn’t see the sunlight much.

I’d been a wild thing until I met you. My virginity was easier for you to take than my heart; & that was yours too, after awhile.

“Who is she?” I ask the Beast.

“A question & an answer. No, don’t grimace. She is both.”

“Why we’re here?”—

I have the dreams every night & for years I did not remember them. Then I became aware, gradually, that I was having them, one really, over & over, every night. Words, on a page, perhaps in a book, or just a sheaf tied together. My body complete & young again. I was in a vague place but for this sheaf of pages, so I read, read as you taught me to.

“Words have a taste, a smell, a sound, create a vision in the mind, touch within, all of these, even more if they are true, if their music is pure. Whatever it is, a long novel, a short poem, a newspaper advertisement even. The truer their music, the more they take on visceral reality, become as flesh & bones.” He told me so many things, like he had a limited time & I had to know all he did, & I listened knowing he would take me when he was ready, & he might be gentle or not. He seemed to obsess for a long time on two things: language & my body.

There was a phrase he had, word made flesh, or its opposite, flesh made word, & this was how he related his two obsessions. It was worse when other things came along.

I read in this sheaf of pages: *“World bides its wicked, their shifting promises to salve & reveal, draw plain the gentle scarlet path from hearts’ trenched old lusts to fine temples of explain to prayer’s electric ride up dark moonbeams & final burst of happy flesh.”* I read it again, & for many dreams after. When finally I turned the page, it was the same words for many dreams again. Had you written this? Were they instructions or a message from you to me?

For awhile, I got God & tried to work this dream & its sheaf into my new life. I told my preacher about the dreams—though not about you. He listened eagerly, for he was young & full of fire for his calling.

But he stopped listening one night. I’d done something daring for me. I’d dressed like a woman. I think I had an idea. I remembered what pleased you & tried this.

His look was a clash of thought & hunger. My legs were gone but my breasts were full & elegantly primped, my lips glistened wetly. My look was fairly plain as we sat together that night in his counseling room next to his bedroom in the empty temple, a full moon through the curtains, or nearly full.

He leaned forward to say a word & his glance lowered & I did not breathe, he was kind, he was compassionate, he read books like you. I wanted that night like I hadn't since you. I did not breathe while his gaze fed, & considered.

"Tender hours & compassion!" roars the Beast to return me where I am, the Underneath, where all roots, I notice many torsos, writhing shadows, some fucking with happy grunts & cries, others silent, a knee bent before another, hoping, perhaps, that the sky watches & rewards such humility, the manacle, the cruel tongue, I turn away again—

What happened next? Did we embrace, did he take what I had left to offer? I don't know but I'd lost God again, began watching clocks more, reading books about time, its absolute consume of flesh & empires, its relative reality—

It's a long way from there to here, & what's left.

Tell me, what's left?

Doesn't matter. He held no God I cared for. That night, another night, some night, you showed me, let me read, more of that sheaf: *"What better hustle than any king's great cry to war, luring gestures to easy superiority, any preacher's offer of a God that favors one over another, than to cat a stripling squalling into this world with no better explain than what his answerless race can offer?"*

Was reading that when I began waiting for you? When my crushed, loyal heart began to see in these dreams instructions for your return? As you had taught me, as you had shown me what to wear for your pleasure while refusing any thought I seemed to grapple with only to gain your notice?

I don't like to say to myself: you're coming back to me. I keep this hidden, can't let them see, or know.

Since I can't know, I can only believe. Since I can only believe, the temptation is to believe what I'd more dearly wish.

I wish I had let you do it that night. I could have let you kill me, & I think you would have then driven that black blade into your own heart, our bloods & bodies one as we died.

You'd been pushing toward it. Eliminating books in your great library. Nobody knew but me but then, nobody knew about me.

"What purpose!" I cry at the Beast, distances between us vary illogically in the Underneath, I waver in & out of awareness, I find him with . . . Maya? No. Yes.

"Let's say maybe for now."

"Why ferment, why breath, why dream?" He nods, leans down & kisses her pink cheek. Her eyes are open but not lit by awareness.

"Why want's rootless temple?"

We move around each other though somehow I never get nearer her. He does not lunge at me, knows this would be bad.

"Why does she dream of this clearing? Why don't you ask this? Why this clearing shaped like a temple in full moonlight? Is that Maya there? Dead? A coma, a simulacra?"

"You are facing me, the roaring core of this story, book, what you've been writing toward all these years. There lies the prize of this story, the code & conduit & key. Is she the

butchered torso, once the ‘wanting half-child dressing for her teacher’s every pleasure in glaring new love’s ceaseless pitch?’” he reads from the manuscript a broken-off piece of me had given Maya. His page contains more words than mine I rush him, for the manuscript, for Maya, we clash inside, deep inside, I cannot match his strength so I sing & sing again, wake the hour’s tenderness & compassion—

“Nothing divides us but the walls hands have made,” he told me that last night, burning his private words into my hips & shoulders, with candle wax & my . . . menstrual blood & . . . my cum juices, I lay before you a wide open eye in love, a soft croon of bones, there were some nights when you would make our room black & sit far from me & steer me into cumming with your voice alone, sometimes just your breathing, sometimes you would cuff & bind & gag me & instruct me to follow my breaths slower into a deep long cumming & then faster into a quick, tight one.

“Aaah god!” she cries out. Blind nights, blowing wash to the seas, she is between us, we share her, grow tendrils & tentacles to comfort her, is this Maya? What left of Maya?

“Nothing salves the closest wounds,” she thrashes & sighs, her cunt bare & tight to my tongue’s & fingers’ touch. “Happiness lies in loving the bars, kissing the cage, endless singing its song.” She cries out from the deepest star within her dream-torso, is it Maya? Whole & hungry now, the Beast licks as I stroke (Is it?), her singing louder now, the temple of moonlight roars & shakes all the secret worlds within. We let her go, slowly, to what remains of her (Maya?) by daylight, in an old vessel damned to finally go, like faith, a cringing lash at a time—Maya?

“To what purpose” I whisper to the Beast, as we haunt & howl the Underneath, its nocturnal caverns & corridors. “Little but blood & consequence,” he replies & I can see the old bones tearing & framing his chest are ever nearer to burst. Reads from the manuscript again: “Stray planks on a wide foam. Tonight an old village is burning. Everything goes.”

My death is long in the old house, my memories the fine thing of blood & delusion, I see him return with the black blade, my life reverses, I arc back to that night that hour, he would kiss my legs & tell me they strode through his heart making him strong, my round hips we rode for hours together, he once told me a thought would come to him, a thought of his love for me & we would embrace, & he would lose something, would feel himself within my flesh, he called them our scarlet hours because that was my color, the one I gave to him in deepest, subtlest love—

“Many books, tenderness, & compassion”

They treat me like an old carcass, play the TV, programs about a girl, a code, a key, endless war.

When he comes, he is bigger, maybe it’s my sight, I see in shadows now, but he warms me & I no longer lie in a cold room with tired sick blood counting down, I remember it all, how you watched me undress in the morning light, I would come to your rooms while the trucks on the avenue pounded, & noise of students & teachers, musicians, soldiers, prisoners, the ships

in the skies above, I came to you in your rooms still filled with thousands of books, you still believed, you told me

“Nothing goes away, nothing returns” & I tell you again, my first & last lover of shadows, you move between my thighs full of wonder & knowing both, now gone a moment, my senses shattered by this scarlet hour, you return to take me again, but wait, a glint, take me, tell me to breathe slower, a glint (Maya?), take me harder then slower & slower, tell me to breathe slower & slower (a glint?) (Maya?), I want to bring you from this world, my love, let us, let us now, flee from the prisons hid deeper than earth in every human heart (glint!) (Maya!), “consume us now, let the morning light consume us, dearest love’s going morning light”—I want to come with you this time—I’m ready—

“Shit” whispered one drinker in awe.

The others nod.

Another is looking at a magazine left on the bar’s counter next to an empty coffee cup. Reads the following story:

“By middle evening things began to fragment. The TV was all fucked up, each station seeming rooted in a different place & year, & maybe reality. After all, who had not heard of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by the early 1960s & yet here was the Johnny Carson late night talk show & a woman on it, a Missourian who said plainly her name was Martin Luther King Jr. & nobody blinked. They laughed however when she said Missourians were considered Southerners by many & thus got no respect.

“There was no going back. I walked down the broken steps of the building to the liquor store a block away. The ships hovered over as always, recently. Had to remember this: they hadn’t always been there.

“Small store, always crowded. Like many buildings, it was cracked open & the line led down the steps into the mud out front. I pulled out my money & panicked, some it was old script & was already disintegrating. I slipped & dropped it & the line moved & I had to hurry.

“The owner was slow, he talked extensively & didn’t care how long the line or the wait. He was telling a young longhair about a magazine that had the real dope on the aliens & what had happened to all of us. See, nobody knew for sure, & most people were forgetting things had been different. The ships hadn’t always been there. The mud, the blasted-out buildings & rules against re-building anything—

“I got jittery & had to use the toilet. Small dirty room with a hole in the wall for light. A coffee cup stood on the toilet’s lip, full of something creamy & badly yellow. I picked it up, put it in the trash can, the kind with a swinging lid. It began to bubble & I did my business fast & ran.

“Never did get my booze. The tiny joint had two counters & I tried the second but people kept pushing ahead of me. I screamed & ran out.

“Shit. TV again. Nothing new, just old shows, like we’d broadcast them into space & here they were coming back, taking over, but mixing up, not right. I don’t fucking know.”

Look up. Stars, their journeys of fire & dust. More to it than fine ass & disappointment on earth.



More to it than daylight's expansive penury, the endless crowding faces to & fro, restless, unspent, wearying all.

The ships *are* overhead, & they've always been, watching, descending, mixing with will & caprice alike. The lies kings & preachers tell are sometimes kindly, protecting men-children & women-children from the million-fanged abyss they walk inches above.

& perhaps too the brilliant musics everywhere which belies the necessity of this life's brief, mortal suffering—civilizations push their numbers to dwell dully in the murk, puff dream-smoke or quaff joy-juice, mistake an orgasm for intimacy, mistake a marker on a mound of disturbed earth for grieving, or understanding.

The traffic is moving distantly from a coffee house's high window, & if I let cry my vision I can reach there & dab it with my words & imaginings, call one of those sets of headlights driven by a hungerer, not quite a man, importantly not quite a man, he drives the night on that highway toward a place that will answer him. The night is mildly cool, windows open, air blows in like night's sugared treat offered, & sometimes he let his hands lax & fall, drives by suggestion, allows the car's innate will to consciousness to flare & thus its instinct to survive, it can drive itself, it can collaborate in this, if let, if believed, if trusted enough—

He lets the car drive, lets it open out to full intention, & looks in the back seat to where precious Whistler rests on a small yellow pillow. Whistler, come from dreams, Whistler, who needs to make contact, Whistler, manifest in this world as a leaf deep in the White Woods, Whistler, are you fucking listening to me about this? Whistler comes from the White Woods!

Whistler speaks but only in reply & only the same words as spoken. Does Whistler simply mime? No, he's decided after driving with Whistler for this long & how his own thinking has changed about everything in that time, the ships are really overhead, civilization does push faces en masse deep into the murk, makes sure each face faces many others, makes sure each face confuses the others with an idea of truth, of knowledge, of possessing something another lacks, of envy when not jealousy, of ideas that conflate difference with threat, of the possibility of one language tapping the music better than another, one ragged tome of letters & questions over another, each face pushed to mass with some & not all, & want & want & want

Who he was before this trip is fragments, unconnected & fairly important, what matters is that Whistler get to where he's bound & do what he is bound for doing.

He. Or she. A joke. Both, neither. The cries for knowing in these cars speeding on all sides of him, the hurry for gain or blood spent to plug loss.

More than any of this. Knowing the ships are up there, have always been up there, knowing the murky mass of faces striding brightly in ignorance, raising high the reflections in civilization's thin puddle, calling to one another of one image or another, this is not what Whistler is about, what Whistler has taught him, how he has changed.

The car has driven itself some miles now, call it a happy creature as much as aught else, it was Whistler who made him see that to create anything intentionally was to breathe, share, give life to it. What kept all these cars around them obedient, dozing mindless of their own being was how the will nearest them caged them in, how each car's dreamless sleep reached out & massed around each other car's possible waking. Kept cocooned in years & slavery.

He laughs again. Whistler taught him language's snares, & its open doors. Whistler taught him . . . but then not really. Who teaches a child to hunger, to want touch, to love music & sunshine, to fear a little the night & its potent surprises?

But it began somewhere & that's how it was early on. The night he passed out in the motel room covered in shit & blood & cum & bourbon, what else, he didn't know, passed out & was somewhere else, best called "other years," abed with a pretty companion & about to fall asleep when a sound, a start, the dim room's light showing a movement on the bed, he wasn't in it now but his companion was, scared, a tiny movement across the bed covering, a spider? Perhaps, his companion cowered & he swept the tiny creature gently off the bed, & then, in fractured minutes, there was now a moth, a clumsily flapping being, growing larger?

Larger & now a bird no longer a moth, a bird with a flat topped head now landing on the bed & he was told "that's Whistler" but by whom? Whistler lay now on a small yellow pillow, wet, as though just hatched, yet able to fly, Whistler indeed.

More fractured time & the dream left & the shat bloodied hotel room left & this car on the highway & Whistler in the back seat on the yellow pillow, both from that dream, now how was that, what had happened?

How did I know Whistler came from the White Woods? This is what I wondered, wondered a lot, it was probably all that I still wondered about. Or asked Whistler about when I discovered he could or was willing to communicate with me.

"White Woods?"

"White Woods"

"What are they?"

"What are they."

"Are we going there?"

"Going there?"

Sometimes it got more complex than this & I would get upset, I would *feel the murk* coming back & panic. Whistler did not do this to me. It was the questions, not asking them but expecting something of them, bringing to questions nascent answers, wanting to be right.

But the White Woods was not something I had known familiarly back then, before this drive. It was what I dreamed about now, whenever I slept, though I didn't really call it sleep, I can only say things shifted & after fractured times I knew that Whistler was from the White Woods, & this was important, & there were other things to know & I did not know them.

We keep passing that billboard for Black Dog Diner, that exact one, I'm not sure anything is

wrong but gently take back control from the car & pull off the highway to near it.

& I do it again. & I do it again. Then I stop doing this. I stop everything. We sit at the side of the highway, not far from the billboard, yet hardly off the road itself. There is a stasis now, nothing repeats.

“Whistler?”

“Whistler.”

“Where now?”

“Where, now.”

I nod but think harder.

“Forward or back?”

“Forward. Or back.”

Thinking is getting me nowhere. Cars, sound asleep to themselves, roar powerfully by. What then?

“What. Then.”

“Barkeep, what the hell is this crap?”

“This is like *Herbie the Love Bug* for pot-heads!”

Everyone at Luna T’s Cafe’s bar is restless & annoyed. Now what?

When movement without isn’t working well, or at all, chance at movement within. Pull back from the external traffic & reck its equivalent within. Blood, piss, bile within. Music, sadness within. Memories within. The steady of bones, warmth of skin & muscle.

Perhaps the traffic between inner & outer, what pours out & in—

“Go slowly here”

“Go slowly”

“The murk is safe, a blinding cozy womb.”

“Move toward it now.”

“Let to it now.”

“A face among faces.”

“Faces confirm, encourage.”

“What else but faces?”

“What else but faces?”

“What else but faces?”

“Faces?”

“Faces.”

The car begins to move again. I let it, or rather do not try to stop it. We pass the Black Dog Diner billboard & eventually come to the Black Dog Diner itself. The car pulls into the far end of the parking lot & parks itself away from the few other cars present. I sit there for a moment. I don’t remember leaving this car once since I . . . don’t remember entering it.

Something like fear.

"I don't want to leave, Whistler."

"Leave, Whistler."

"I can't."

Silence. No kind of reply.

I get out of the car & walk through the cool night to the Black Dog Diner, through its doors, into the murk of men, not knowing if I will lose into it again now that I have left Whistler in the car.

I sit. A glass of water is on my table. A menu of words, I speak them without reading, I know the words already, I'm breathing hard, this is choking me.

"They clobbered them!"

"They did not!"

"I'm telling ya, it was ova' by the 4th innin'. Nothing to do but let the thing die an inning at a time."

"Fuck you, Jonesie!"

"Hey, watch yer language"

"Goddamn your piety!"

"Now you're taking the Lord's name in vain!"

"What Lord, Jonesie? Show me a Lord whose Goddamn name I'm taking in vain! What does that mean anyway? Take the Lord's name in vain? You tell me, Preacha!"

"Go to Church or read your Bible!"

"What Church? I don' got a Bible! How about if I look in this month's *Penthouse Letters*? Is the Lord not in those letters from lonely, horny people trying to make a connection, tell their story?"

"Why do you always do this? What's your point? To make me feel bad? Show was a smartass mouth you really have? I already *know*. You don't believe in anything ain't wiggling wet in your bed!"

"Ha! Listen to Jonesie! 'Wiggling wet' in my bed! Sounds pretty good actually. I never asked. You got a sister, Jonesie? A daughter? A niece. A horndog neighbor?"

I leave then, there, now, I run back through the murk that is everywhere now.

"Whistler! Whistler!" I call & try to listen & I hear nothing & I call & I call & I call—

I run, then I crawl, then I begin to cry, then I fall to the ground, & I pass out in my despair.

When I come to we are driving again, Whistler is in the back, & I know: never ask about the White Woods again. It's where he's from, where we're going but if I want to keep with this, I can't ask.

When next I sleep, or just lose into fractured time, I see a face, a face & nothing else. Blue eyes,

a kind young face, one that is not murky, that is clear & looking back at me, & this is where we are going & we have to get there very soon.



To be continued in Cenacle | 77 | April 2011

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Dave King



The Psychedelic Experience: Is It Real? [Essay]

From A Short Introduction to Hallucinogens, 2009.

Possibly the most frequent argument I hear against the psychedelic experience is the claim that it is not real. It is a delusion, an illusion, an aberration from the truth of sobriety. There is no way of scientifically evaluating reality, and so the following is only my opinion—but it is an opinion formed as a result of experience, research, and a great deal of contemplation. I shall attempt to explain why, in my opinion, the reality argument is flawed.

I will use the term “hallucinogen” throughout this essay because it is the word most commonly used to refer to this class by the media and by the layman. There is a great problem with the term hallucinogen. A hallucination is, by definition, something that does not exist in the external world. Hallucinogen, therefore, immediately creates an image of something that has no root in validity, of a perceptual conjuror of illusion. I shall endeavor to explain the role of true (or full) hallucinations in the “validity” of hallucinations and the psychedelic experience, and the “validity” of the psychedelic experience. It is important to remember that hallucinations and the psychedelic experience are not synonymous.

True hallucinations are not particularly central to the psychedelic experience. Distortions in space and time, through any sense, can be argued to be on the hallucinogenic spectrum, but the infrequent experience (indeed, an experience almost unfound except at high doses, or from various doses of very particular hallucinogens) of a complete sensory delusion is often not important. Not only can a true hallucination ever be proved to be false, as it is often perceived to be more real by the user than “reality” itself, but the psychedelic experience has greater value elsewhere. Hallucinogens alter the way in which you process information in a profound but sometimes subtle way. That which is valued highest is an ability to strip the user of presupposition and conditioning, to induce life-changing experiences of ineffable profundity, and to allow one to view the world as he or she did as a child, far freer of clouding judgment. If somebody takes 200ug of LSD with the hedonistic intention of getting hammered and having a laugh, it is likely that they will gain no more from the experience than that. If however, a hallucinogen is taken with the aim of gaining a greater understanding of oneself or the world in which he or she lives, or for self-development, or for freeing the subconscious for psychotherapy, it is more than likely that the user will experience some sort of elucidation. The changing of the manner in which one thinks can lead to incredible insights of a philosophical nature, if one applies the tool they are given to appropriate ends.

It is true that open-eye hallucinations, that is to say the appreciation of sensory information that has no root in the external world, are rare. Far more frequently, the pattern

of perception is altered so that the same data is collected by the senses and sent to the brain, but the very mechanism of the brain changes to alter the final image perceived. It is as if a code-breaker suddenly started using a new algorithm to interpret messages. It is impossible to quantifiably assess the validity of either mechanism, except by defining true perception as that most commonly experienced. This has certain problems. Firstly, perception can never be truly translated. Secondly, it is self-evident that to compare this altered algorithm to the seemingly ever-prevailing algorithm of sobriety, the latter will appear more prevalent, causing the former to be considered untrue. This is simply bad reasoning, for all it says is that there are more people sober, more of the time, than there are people under the influence of a hallucinogen.

The most common form of hallucination is of a kind which we can experience sober, every day (and certainly every night): closed eye visuals. For those of us with strong visual imaginations, images manifest themselves when one closes one's eyes. Under the hallucinogenic influence, these images become markedly more intense, vivid, clear and explorative. Occasionally, these images may creep under the eyelid when the eye is open, and fractal patterns may be superimposed upon reality.

One of the most salient forms of open-eye visuals, according to my research, is the recognition and manifestation of previously unappreciated patterns. Looking at an uneven surface, or upon scattered gravel, the surface of a brick, the crumpling of a fabric, or at a bed of grass, one may focus upon particular configurations and relationships previously unidentified. Another form is an unconscious reduction of a visual area to its basic patterns of size and lines and form, which leads to a cycling through various mental archetypes to which the pattern could be assigned. A crumpled bit of paper, for instance, could be looked at and identified as a whole host of things, depending on the way it was folded and the casting of shadows. It may appear as a face, and then as a house, or as a mouse fighting for a piece of cheese. Normally, unless one falls too much into this game, the sober form is still appreciated.

This is a game that, like the closed-eye visuals, can be played without the taking of a hallucinogen. Meditate upon a physical item until it is unrecognizable, or repeat a word over and over again until you have forgotten its meaning, and it appears alien and infinitely improbable.

Distortions in space are very hard to analyze. A wall may appear to have lost its flat, linear properties and may appear weaving and bobbing like the skin of an ocean. Compare it to a ruler, however, and the ruler also is pulsing and breathing. Perform any test of physics you like, and the results would be the same as under sober conditions, and yet it is quite manifestly different. How can one quantifiably explain the distortion in the perception of what is usually called a centimeter? It still appears to be 10 millimeters across, but what on earth does that mean? To look across a room may cast its dimensions into measurement of miles, of vast distances. And yet, it is a vast distance. Compared to a supernova somewhere in the depths of space, we are unfathomably tiny, but compared to an atom or a Planck length, we are also immeasurably massive. Every step we take spans billions of molecular measurements. If we are tiny, we are tiny titans. To look through psychedelic eyes at the world, and to see distortions in space, one may very well think it to be somehow invalid. But upon inspection, upon real observation, it is an impossible thing to claim. The beauty of the psychedelic experience is that one can openly, and with a clear, rational mind, look at the world through sober eyes, and the next minute change the world completely (and yet at the same time, not in the slightest), and by doing so enable a direct comparative analysis of perception. It is quite literally a temporary

broadening of human understanding.

The human perception of the world is a very complex thing to analyze. From philosophy to psychology to neurochemistry, it is central to almost everything we can study. World-views differ among ages, cultures, subcultures, individuals, states of consciousness, emotive temperaments, and extra-physical beliefs—and are virtually impossible to compare. Think about how your own perception of the world has changed throughout your life. I will detour away from the realm of psychedelics temporarily to bring you examples of different ways people see the world and factors that contribute to these different perceptions.

There is a theory known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which claims that our very understanding of the nature of the world around us is shaped by our linguistic systems and classifications. It postulates a systematic relationship between our thought patterns, our mental categorization of our habitat, and our behavior with the structure and pattern of our language.

It all comes down to classification systems, on which our understanding of the world is reliant. Take the color spectrum. The English language splits a certain section of the spectrum into the following five classifications: green, blue, grey, brown, and black. Standard Welsh takes the same section and divides it into four divisions: gwyrd, glas, llwyd, and du. Gwyrd refers to about half of the English green spectrum; glas to the remaining half, the entirety of the blue spectrum and half of grey; llwyd to half of grey and half of black; and du to the remainder of brown and the entirety of black. Modern colloquial Welsh has the five categories gwyrd, glas, llwyd, brown, and du, which match the English color classifications precisely. The Ibo language splits this section of the spectrum into only two categories: aheha ndu (green, blue, and a little grey) and ojii (brown, black, and a little grey). The writings of Homer show Ancient Greek color classifications to have been divided by shade or darkness, as opposed to hue. Homer will refer to a wine-dark ocean, and is describing its lightness. He is not saying that the ocean is red. The English language, according to Paul Kay, has eleven basic words for color across the full spectrum, while the New Guinea language Dani has only two, and the Amazonian Pirahu tribe have no fundamental vocabulary for color at all. They simply do not analyze and classify that particular area of sensory information in the way that we do.

What does this example show us? It shows us how language is linked to classification systems in our understanding of the world. Cultures may have different words for the same things, you might say, but they surely see the same things? What does it matter if they divide things differently?

Our language causes us to draw invisible lines around things. This is a necessary development of thought, for it would be impossible to function in the way that we do without an ability to identify objects. Imagine that you are standing in a wood, but you do not have any sort of vocabulary such as “tree” or “branch” to define what you see around you. You are staring at what you would under other circumstances call a tree; the language to which you are normally accustomed would cause you to group a particular series of shapes together. Without language to distinguish anything in your field of vision from another, would you have any sort of appreciation that the trunk, the branches, the twigs, the leaves, and the roots were a “single object,” while the ground, the grass, and the surrounding trees were separate? If you had an appreciation of a word for only “leaf,” you would divide the world into “leaves” and “not-leaves.” The rest of the tree, the ground, the surrounding trees, the branches, and everything else that falls under the category of “not-leaf” would be identifiable under a single label.

Imagine this scenario a step further: you have no language and you have just found



yourself in this wood as your first experience on earth. You have never before seen anything, heard anything, or smelt anything. Would you see that wood then as you saw it before? It would be completely and utterly transfigured. With no classification systems and no language, there would be no immediate understanding of depth, distance, color, texture, or light. Remember that in a non-anthropocentric sense, the universe is just an infinite series of happenings. The eyeball (in conjunction with the brain) is able to identify a particular type of happening—the movement of photons—but the images that we see of the world do not exist anywhere except in the human mind. If we close our eyes, it does not mean that the world out there ceases to exist, and neither does it mean that when we have our eyes open we create the world around us, but we do create a type of information from the otherwise arbitrary input of data that our eyes receive to produce the visual sense of the world. Hence the old philosophical conundrum of whether or not a tree makes a sound if it falls in a wood, with nobody to hear it. Yes, the fallen tree would cause vibrations through the air as it hit the ground, but the word “sound” refers to the way in which the human brain interprets a particular kind of otherwise arbitrary data and turns it into a type of information. With no human to hear the tree falling, it cannot make a sound, because the sound is not made by the falling tree—the falling tree produces only the environmental factors for the brain to decipher—the sound is made by the brain.

Before language, before the brain has had time to make classification systems and order the kaleidoscopic mayhem of sensory data into a manageable system of perception, that person in the woods would be seeing a wholly different world to the one we live in. That person does not yet know that a particular sequence of lines, colors, and shapes means a tree, or that a particular configuration can be used to determine distance and depth. Moreover, without any sort of linguistic line between what he will later come to call “I” and what he will later come to call “the world,” there is no divorce between subject and object. This newly born person is exposed to the world in its most truthful manifestation, before the brain has a chance to impose order and classification, meaning and comprehension. This person will grow, learning all the time to classify and categorize the world into identifiable chunks. I believe that this process is not entirely dictated by language, but that language is an indubitably important factor. The ability to memorize first requires the ability to categorize, to turn data into information. Consequently, this person will forget what it is like to see through the eyes of a newborn baby, and later what it is like to be a child. This person will live in the here and now, the ever-rolling continuum of the present.

Shakespeare said that, “the fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool.” Lao Tzu said that, “to know that you do not know is the best. To pretend to know when you do not know is a disease,” and Socrates said that, “the only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.” All too often, one forgets how little he or she knows and how much he or she does not. All too often one believes that he or she knows precisely what is what. The person born in the woods will one day see the world, burdened by conditioning, presupposition, and habit and he or she will say “this is truth.” With all the cultures in the world, with their different ideologies, with completely different perceptions of their environment, with different opinions and faiths and beliefs, with their different languages, their different subcultures and values, their different individuals and religions and philosophies, their different diets and sleeping patterns and exposures to light, what exactly is this truth? And what of the fluctuation within individuals themselves, of emotional change, of spiritual change? What of the changes caused by maturity, by sleep deprivation, or by food deprivation? The truth is argued not to be what

is out there, because that does not change, the truth is argued to be a specific biochemical, physiological configuration. The truth is a set of particular neuroelectrical pathways, that change from day to day, from person to person, and whether or not a particular chemical has been ingested. “This is truth,” one says, but he or she does not know truth.

Imagine being brought up in a world where you are taught quite inflexibly what is what. In this world, there is a library, full of books that suggest rather manifestly that what what is, is not necessarily what you believed it to be. These books offer a different perspective, a new way of seeing. They may or may not hold any truth, but who is to say whether or not they hold any more or less truth than what you thought previously? All they offer is a new way of looking at the world.

Dr. Timothy Leary identified three factors that influence a psychedelic experience: the drug, the set, and the setting. Without knowledge of the latter two, it is very hard to suggest how an experience might play out. Set refers to the mindset of the person taking the substance: what they plan to achieve from it, their previous experience, and their personality. Setting refers to the surroundings in which the drug is taken. During clinical experiments with hallucinogens, doctors found that users would react with anxiety and discomfort to the hospital setting, with its hard, white, sterilized appearance. It is common for users to experience a wish to be in a natural setting, or a garden. The drug itself plays an obvious part, but a sensible user of psychedelics will pay careful attention to both set and setting when preparing for an experience.

The psychedelic experience may be accompanied by a vibrant, brilliant enhancement of colors—as if they were only really being seen for the first time. Distortions in time and space often occur, as may a depersonalization of self, something known as ego-loss. Without falling into an unconscious state of any kind, the world manifests itself in a way not unlike a dream that appears far more real than the normal world does. Objects that are usually unnoticed may develop new significance, and it is not uncommon to find elucidation in entirely new aspects of things with which you had thought yourself familiar. The filter of the psychedelic experience is almost invariably one accompanied by a feeling of ineffability—a feeling that what is being experienced cannot be described by language, and that an attempt to do so will at best produce a vague, futile, and inadequate representation (in the same way that a photograph will not always satisfactorily encapsulate the precise nature of a situation). The psychedelic experience can produce deep analytic introspection, or it can induce a euphoric and vocal appreciation of the world. It can bypass the expectations of what we usually suppose to see, and what we usually look for, and show us something new or unforeseen. As a psychoanalytic or psychotherapeutic tool, it can yield incredible results. It is not uncommon to hear that a psychedelic experience has been such a profound, spiritual, religious, or philosophical encounter that the user treasures it as a rare and often life-changing moment for the rest of his or her life.

For those of you with objections to the use of hallucinogens, you may well find it an interesting exercise to examine precisely what it is about them that makes you feel that way. With a poorly chosen set and setting, unpleasant “bad trips” can occur; perhaps you know somebody who has had such an unfortunate experience. Perhaps your objection is a direct effect of their illegality, but this is not as simple as it seems. Perhaps (and this certainly is not a reason that would be unjust) you feel unnerved by their power to alter the workings of the mind so profoundly. All human fear is rooted in an inability to control, and although the psychedelic experience is often accompanied by a feeling of clarity and sobriety (depending on the drug),

it is certainly a terrifying thought to lose control of one's own mind, even temporarily. I do not know your reasons for objection, and I have no desire to change your mind, nor do I want to appear to be condemning your view. But as the saying goes, a mind is like a parachute: if it isn't open, it won't work. It's not a great simile, but you get the idea.

To object to hallucinogens, without personal experimentation, on the fervent belief that what they present is not real, is a viewpoint I find most peculiar. Indeed, to have an absolute, immovable belief about anything at all without a personal experience in it is something I find a little silly. One might as well believe with equal fervency that the mindset of someone under practiced meditation is not real, or that one from a different culture and language sees the world in a way with less truth than you. I may as well claim that the drug of human sobriety shows us visions, hallucinations of structure and framework, of a practical unreality. Against what is this value of truth measured? It is wise to make sure that you are not egocentrically elevating your own flexible, malleable mindset to the position of truth. One cannot very well assess the reality of a situation of which they have no experience. Surely to take one configuration of brain activity and to compare it against another configuration, which is precisely what one is doing here, and to somehow decide that the world is more accurately analyzed via one than the other, especially with an understanding only of what one of these sets of data actually signifies, must be a fallacy.

All we can really say is that our sober mindset (a particular neurological pattern) has been deemed by natural selection more appropriate for survival than any other—for we do not find ourselves day to day in a natural state such as that conjured by 400mg of mescaline. The fact that we have this particular sober mindset proves that, against all competing “base states,” we have evolved that particular neurological pattern as an appropriate state to exist in. If an archaic *Homo sapiens*, 200,000 years ago, came across a predator under a mindset akin to that produced by some hallucinogens, they may very well be more inclined to approach it with a sense of wonder and curiosity than to turn tail and flee. As you may appreciate, this is not a great approach for survival purposes. Nevertheless, this cannot mean that the sober mindset is in any way more valid or more truthful than any other, merely that it may have been more useful in a fight-or-flight situation in our ancestral past.

The opportunity to examine the world in a wholly new way, assuming that this examination is not accompanied by any physiological or metabolic detriment, is in my opinion such an important opportunity because it provides a unique holiday from one's sober mindset to fully compare and analyze what one previously held as truths. It provides a temporary release from a whole host of preconceptions, predispositions, and presuppositions. In our sober lives we see very much what we wish to see in the world around us. The psychedelic experience offers a chance to see more of what we notice every day, but haven't really seen since childhood. That which, like a cosmic optical illusion, can be seen in a different way. How much truth it may contain is something personal, something that must be experienced and analyzed and contemplated by those people who have an interest in discovering it for themselves. My opinions are of no more validity than yours, but I would ask you keep an open and a curious mind to all avenues of life. An opinion cannot be of very much personal value if one has never really thought properly about what it means.

The truth of the psychedelic experience, the reality . . . what authority does the deaf man have to judge the truthfulness of sound? That is a riddle that can only be answered by those who choose to find out for themselves.

WITHIN'S WITHIN: SCENES FROM THE PSYCHEDELIC REVOLUTION

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Notes on Contributors

AbandonView lives in the American Rust Belt. His artwork last appeared in *Cenacle* | 72 | April 2010. His art & writing can be found at: <http://wetscraps.blogspot.com>. I am particularly grateful for his art, now that my J. D. Salinger memoriam is finally written.

Ralph Emerson lives in South Glastonbury, Connecticut. While his essays often appear in *The Cenacle*, his graphic contribution this time is his first since *Cenacle* | 45 | April 2001.

Iris Weinstein Haggai lives in Tel Aviv, Israel. She is currently studying design, & working to create visual representations to the dilemmas she's found in the US & in Israel.

Judih Haggai lives in Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry regularly appears in *The Cenacle*. Recently, we have been collaborating on radio projects (her new show on SpiritPlants Radio is called "Spirit World Restless"). Her work can be found online at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>.

Dave King is a student at the University of Kent at Canterbury in the UK. He founded the UKC Psychedelics Society, online at www.ukcpsychedelics.co.uk.

Horse Lampner lives in New England. His fiction last appeared in *Cenacle* | 75 | October 2010. Few know horses better than Horse.

Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 75 | October 2010. Her website is: <http://rollwiththechanges.org>. Her poem in the current issue stands outstandingly alone.

J. D. Salinger was born in 1919 in New York City, & died this year in Cornish, New Hampshire. His published works include: *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Nine Stories*, *Franny and Zooey*, & *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters / Seymour: An Introduction*. Though my fixation may not resemble his much now, I sat at his feet for many years, & still keep a place there . . .

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. He is the author of many books, including *Brief Cases, Short Spans* (2008). Those who attend the Out Loud Open Mic (<http://www.outloudopenmike.com>) in Melrose, Massachusetts are lucky enough to hear his fine poetry & fiction on a regular basis.

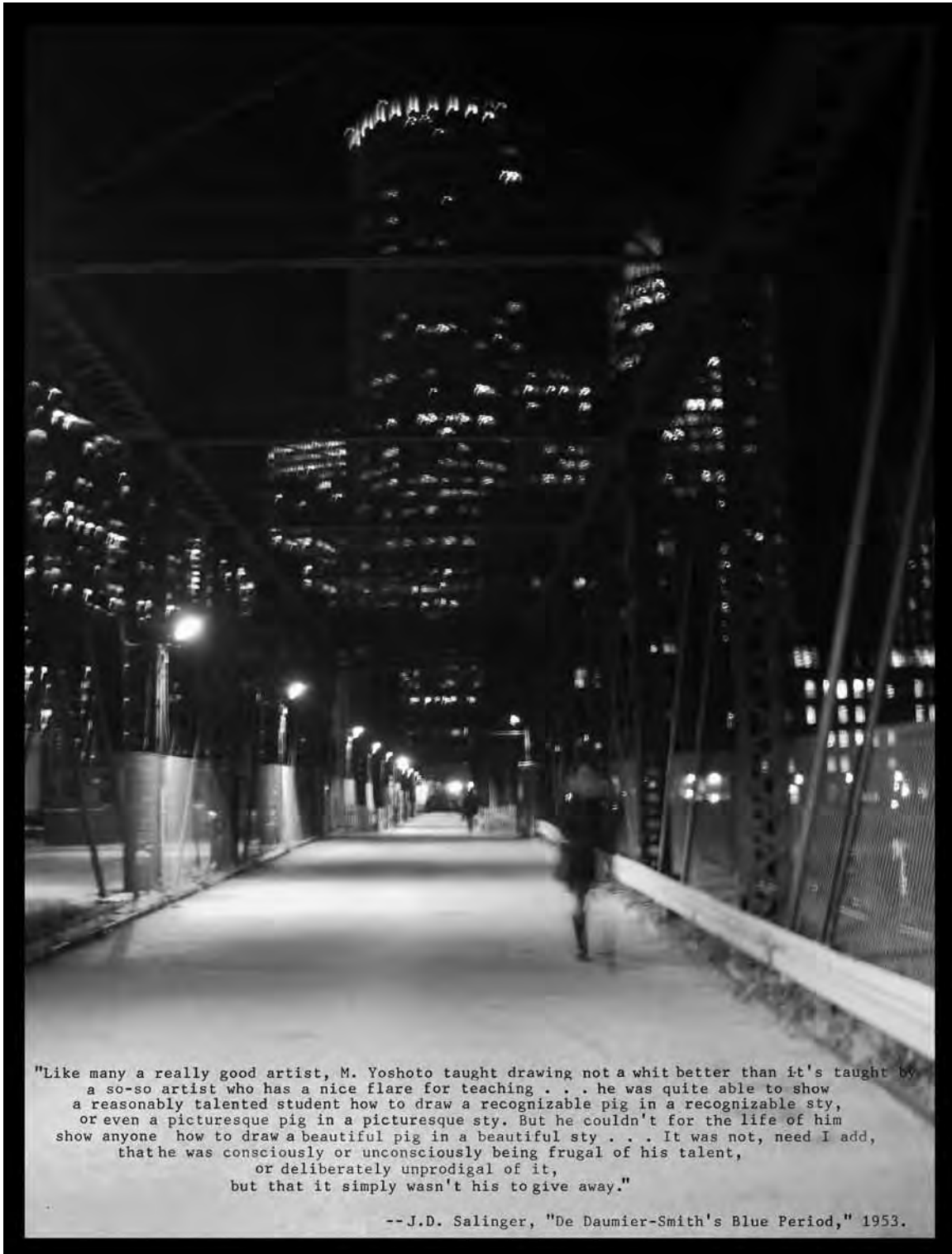
Kassandra Soulard lives in Arlington, Massachusetts. One night recently, we sat in bed, in the darkness, listening to music, happy, like we did seven years ago & a thousand miles from here, the first weekend we met.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Arlington, Massachusetts, in a long arcing twist of hope & despair. Pen in hand, Kassi near, hope. Considering his own jobless woes, & those of millions of others, despair.

Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor lives north of Boston, Massachusetts. Her writing last appeared in *Cenacle* | 75 | October 2010. It is really exciting this time around to feature excerpts from her novel-in-progress.

* * * * *





"Like many a really good artist, M. Yoshoto taught drawing not a whit better than it's taught by a so-so artist who has a nice flare for teaching . . . he was quite able to show a reasonably talented student how to draw a recognizable pig in a recognizable sty, or even a picturesque pig in a picturesque sty. But he couldn't for the life of him show anyone how to draw a beautiful pig in a beautiful sty . . . It was not, need I add, that he was consciously or unconsciously being frugal of his talent, or deliberately unprodigal of it, but that it simply wasn't his to give away."

--J.D. Salinger, "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period," 1953.

